

YOUTH, YOUTH,....!

By
Desmond Coke



Illustrated by
H.M.BROCK



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"Distinctly a rum go!"

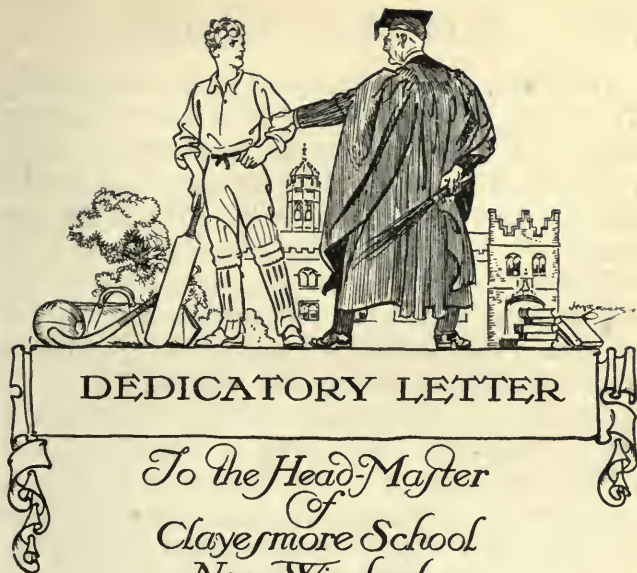
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By
DESMOND COKE
With Illustrations by
H. M. BROCK



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MY DEAR ALEX DEVINE,

THERE are many reasons, even external, why this book of school-stories should be dedicated to you. It was your kind letter about my Novel of Life at Shrewsbury, *The Bending of a Twig*, that first brought us into touch; it was our common interest in a boy, my nephew at Clayesmore, that drew us together; your school welcomed me often from London in the days of Peace, from the training-camps of War, and from the trenches of France; lastly, when I was invalided out in 1917, I spent a very pleasant two-year convalescence as your guest and a "War-work" House Master to your senior boys.

There are, however, reasons far less accidental. You, I think, will understand more easily than most why, when I take up my pen again after its five-year rest, it is used not to attempt cure of the world's many ills, but to write what is for the most part frankly and unashamedly a book of schoolboy "rags." Your wide experience has let you see that what boys, and possibly men also, of all ranks need, to keep them out of mischief, is fun, cheerfulness, above all "colour," in their lives. Again, I am only too well aware that in most British minds the idea of Art is bound up indissolubly with that of Gloom, just as good form is considered a sure mark of mediocrity: but you at least can realize that the present fashion for school-stories of variegated morals and sanguinary oaths does not cover even a small part in the full life of School. The average boy remains stubbornly decent in spite of his biographers, and fun—given a free hand—still bulks larger in him than depravity. It is a foolish master indeed who grudges his boys any outlet for their excess spirits they can find in a polite and duly unobtrusive pulling of the pedagogic leg. This healthy exercise demands merely a little tact on both sides, and the wise master pulls his own leg just a trifle harder than even the most reckless boy.

In all this I am telling you only what you know well enough already, for no Head Master is at more pains to bring amusement, colour, variety of occupation, into his boys' lives, nor is any freer from pomposity: and indeed I am less concerned to give

you instruction than to avoid your criticism of my volume. For this I make no great claim, being content with a modest ambition for my offspring,—that it may earn the most comfortable of modern adjectives and be declared a “jolly” book. Perhaps the time has almost come for so-called “realistic” Fiction either to eschew School life or to confess its necessary incompleteness, since the boy’s deeper moods, as he fights his first doubtful round with life, are too fragile, if not too sacred, for paper. At any rate, whatever your verdict on my share, I trust, in the humble spirit of old Izaak Walton, that you and other children of sixteen to sixty may enjoy heartily the very delightful pictures which that inimitable artist of school life, H. M. Brock, has added to my stories.

Two of your objections to these stories I can probably anticipate. You will say, firstly, that I have painted a freak gallery of masters. To this I beg to make a reply that you must smilingly admit to hold a truth:—some who dashingly elect to follow the high steep path of educating Youth, especially in Science, *are* in truth little less than freaks and these alone provide the basis, in fact or fiction, for any schoolboy “rag.” Nothing, however, universal follows. I should be the last to take a definite side in the time-long, almost friendly, battle between Youth and Age. Every boy of seventeen, however much he may seem to suffer schoolmasters gladly, nurtures a hidden but self-convincing scorn for all his seniors as Victorian or even worse. In his mind’s eye they figure as narrow,

mindcd babblers of Platitude which has no bearing on the things that matter: yet, as a fact, they have been boys whilst he has never been a man. Let him but wait a little and Time will bring in his revenges, for having proudly added something to his vaunted store of wisdom, he suddenly will find himself despised in turn as fool by a yet lower layer of Youth. . . . This is, in truth, some big part of the eternal comedy of Age, and need not make us consider all masters to be idiots oblivious of their childish days or every boy a whiff of Genius trailed straight from Heaven.

The other criticism you may make is that my masters outdo even Solomon in their devotion to the rod. Here again I could plead the necessities of Letters, for nothing surely can be less dramatic as finale than an imposition: but quite apart from such a plea I am not ashamed to say, in an age of kid gloves and knock knees and abortive bleating about "juvenile crime," that I believe an occasional good thrashing would be a healthy moral tonic for almost any boy (and probably most men . . .), whilst all other forms of school punishment seem to breed far more freely—owing to their long duration—the sense of Grievance fatal to a proper feeling between boy and master.

In any event, none of these remarks, and one only of these stories, has its origin at Clayesmore, where a firm discipline is admirably combined with warm-hearted affection; resulting in those natural, friendly boys who live—on your agreeably wooded plateau—a full life of working, digging, playing,

building, in strong contrast with that of many schools dumped down in treeless playing-fields and roped around with soul-killing traditions. Is it surprising if such drab surroundings, together with so general a conviction that only Cricket and Football are good form, ultimately breed a narrow scorn for those that work with hands and a suspicion of all feeling as vulgar and low-class?

I cannot, at the end, resist including my Old Boys, and those present Clayesmorians who were so recently "my" boys, in this Dedication as a sign of gratitude for quite uncommon loyalty; and with every good wish for your admirable school, which, after twenty-five years of the lonely furrow, finds itself suddenly acclaimed in the van of a general but belated movement for Reform,

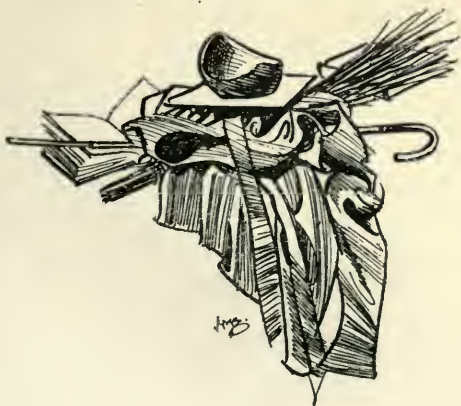
I remain,

Yours ever,

Flat No. 12,

DESMOND COKE.

11 Portland Place, W. 1.





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The DOG'S NAME

TO be called a dirty little greaser, when young, may mean almost nothing, since no healthy boy has ever boasted politeness to his fellows as a Favourite Virtue. To believe it, however, is a different matter and soars at once into a schoolboy tragedy.

Saunders, during his four terms at Sherborough, had probably heard the remark, (which happened to be curiously true,) close on a hundred times. Frequently he had ignored it with scorn as totally below him; less often he had felt it safe to kick the speaker; and sometimes when he was in one of his rare witty moods, he would retort, "Greaser yourself!", and feel that he had scored. Never, in any case, had he considered it as more than an injustice; a queer idea that most of Sherborough

had somehow got. A greaser? The sort of swine that sucked up to masters? Never! No; *that* Saunders was not willing to believe.

Not, at least, until to-day. . . .

To-day, however, he had heard it for the first time from Langford, and Langford's ways were not like those of other men. Langford had been described by the Head Master when in genial mood as "combining the unwise courage of a Matador with the praiseworthy speed and regrettable noise of a Ford motor." Having heard all this during his first term, he had naturally given up the next two years to a fairly successful attempt at earning the description. Now, at the age of fifteen and a half, he possessed a dash never found in any Yankee car and a vocabulary that would leave a mere Matador amazed.

Saunders succumbed to his attack at once.

Langford, for one thing, began—as compared with others—in so mild a key. He came up, almost smiling, to him in the Big Quadrangle after tea. "I say, Saunders," he opened conversationally, "I don't object to your being here."

This struck Saunders, right away, as affable, for most Sherburians obviously had a strong objection which they took little trouble to conceal.

"No?" he said in surprised embarrassment.

"I don't mind your not washing," went on Langford, dumbfounding his hearer by so much magnanimity. "I never saw really why everybody barred you." (Saunders flinched slightly as the other's broad-minded tolerance became more and

more insulting.) "BUT,"—and here what teachers of Greek call "the *δέ* clause" began with a resounding splash, "but I *do* draw the line at beastly little greasers: it *does* give me a pain in the middle to see anyone so much a microbe that he can suck up to old Gangrene: I *can*——"

"I *don't* suck up to old Gangrene," burst out Saunders passionately, as though stung on the raw by this mysterious accusation.

Langford added to his pain by a secret but skilful hack upon the shins and said, "It's Latin prep to-night," in a loud voice as the Head Master, beaming benevolently, rustled past in the beautiful silk gown that he put on for influential parents.

"There, you see!" cried Langford triumphantly, so soon as he had gone. "You're such an ass. I dare say you don't want to be, but anyhow you are. Why do you want to tell the Beak and two suburban parents at the top pitch of your voice that you don't suck up to old Gangrene? Especially as everybody knows you *do*! 'Mind the test tube, sir.' Test Tube" (he went on, angrily, with a long pause between the two syllables): "always like that, as though it was two words! Not" (and a note of sudden despondency crept in among his flood of savagery)—"not that I dare say it *isn't*, but I always call it testube and so does anyone who's not a fuggy little greaser. 'Please, sir, may we have that experiment repeated?' 'Please, sir, what is the exact meaning of the word you just used?' Just like one of the little stinkers

in the calf-bound books your grandmother gives you on your first being put in breeches ! Grrrr ! ”

With the last sentence and the exclamation of disgust there vanished from his voice the oiliness, and from his face the smug ecstasy, that he had thought appropriate to his slight imitation of Saunders in the Science Lab.

“ You make me sick,” he said with blunt straightforwardness, as though fearing that his methods so far had been over-subtle. “ Steward ! ”

Whereat, with a realistic pretence of suffering from a stormy sea passage, he closed his first interview with Saunders and linking his arm in that of a more desirable companion, swung jauntily away across the green stretches of Big Quad. (“ Boys will not walk upon the lawns ” :—Rule 89.)

When about twenty yards away, he turned abruptly, and shouted back at Saunders, still motionless and stunned beside the Chapel buttress.

“ Dirty little greaser ! ” he bellowed, for every one to hear. “ How many D. T.’s have you had this term ? ”

II

Saunders was left thinking.

Apparently the trouble was that he had been too much interested in Science. He *was* rather keen about it, partly because it fitted in with his idea of a profession and he wanted to be more of a success in life than he had been at Sherborough.

But as to old Gangrene ! . . .

It must be here confessed that nobody could possibly think very much of Mr. Green.

Of course, before ever he arrived, his name had been against him.

"Mr. G. A. Green will be the Science Master next term," began the Head Master's sketch of his career placed on the notice board and no one worried about more than that. The fact of his being a M.A.I. and M.E.S. thrilled the School far less than that he should have been christened Green. Nick-names, so soon, flew around the place. "Verdant," naturally, and "Old Allmyeye" became pet terms for the unknown, though others made play with his initials and preferred variations on the good old name of "Gag."

When indeed he made his first entry into the Laboratory and it was noticed that he trod high, looking down over his glasses as if in fear that he had stepped on some one, he was promptly nicknamed "Agag," after the Lesson at evening Chapel wherein that worthy was spoken of as walking delicately. This title continued to be his until half term, when he rashly performed an experiment in which mention had to be (or was) made of gangrene. Then indeed it was felt that out of his own mouth had come the fitting name for such a mouldy type of master.

As "old Gangrene" he was known, and neither loved nor hated but merely scorned, at Sherborough.

Thus it may be imagined with what bitterness Saunders found himself accused of toadying to such a flabby specimen. No other charge could have

made him more likely to achieve the impossible feat of realizing his own nature.

That he was actually and in general a dirty little greaser Saunders was totally unwilling to admit, for self-deception starts earlier than more adult vices, such as drunkenness. No,—but somehow or other, when Langford put it as he had, there *did* seem something in the theory that he had greased, at any rate, to old Gangrene; and that was pretty awful. Certainly he recognized, now, the remarks about experiments and so on as roughly like his own, even apart from the vocal imitation. He blushed as over him there surged the sudden recognition of how Sherborough regarded him and the far worse and more abrupt realization that he more or less deserved their low opinion.

To grease to old Gangrene! . . .

“ *How many D. T.’s have you had this term?* ”

That last remark of Langford’s began next to hammer at his brain. There was still half-an-hour to Chapel and he strolled moodily around the great grey quadrangle, thinking.

He had had *no* D. T.’s this term.

Till now,—till the amazing Langford got to work upon him—he had been proud of that fact. In all his four terms he never had gained one Detention. Was that not excellent? Was it not worthy of all praise from every decent man?

Langford most clearly had implied that it was not. . . .

Saunders till now had never really thought about the matter. He had not set out to avoid punish-

ment deliberately. He had merely worked (he told himself, trying to find excuses for the virtue with which he had now been charged), because he wanted to succeed in his career. He had, so to speak, drifted into being good! . . . None the less, however, he had always understood it was the proper thing to *be*. Over his bed at home hung a beautifully framed motto, "VIRTUE IS ITS OWN REWARD," with a red rose at each corner; in the front of a leaving-book from his Preparatory School the Head Master had said (after Quintilian), "Give me the boy whom praise encourages, whom reward delights, who grieves when he is punished;" whilst in his pocket at this moment there reposed a letter from his Great-Aunt Amelia in which she finally remarked (after nobody except herself), "Work, I always think, is so stimulating and it is surely a great humiliation, a deep degradation, to be punished. Be a good boy, and I will go on sending you oranges, when they are seasonable, as a reward."

It says a good deal for Langford's methods that he could in a few moments overturn such monuments of moral teaching.

Saunders,—to put the matter briefly but expressively,—was totally fed up with Virtue. Work was anathema to him. He sighed for punishment; yea, even above juiceless oranges. He cared nothing for Great-Aunt Amelia's opinion of him, so long as he could make the dashing Langford think him rather less of a smug worm. . . .

The Chapel bell woke him from his reverie but failed to put him in a proper mood

Among the four hundred Sherburians who filed into service with reverently downcast eyes, there walked that evening one whose mind was filled with only a single inappropriate resolve:—to show that he was *not* a greaser, to win punishment, to plague all masters in general and more particularly old Gangrene.

III

It needed no great ingenuity to realize that, if a joke had to be played on Mr. Green, his dear Laboratory was the appointed place. The time came in second school next day.

What precise experiment the Science Master was preparing to perform must be left to practised stinks-men to determine. Sufficient for a layman to relate that having erected a huge glass vessel and having placed a lit burner underneath it, he proceeded with a small mortar to break into morsels a substance of almost garishly red hue.

"This dye," he said, bending over it a face gleaming with the moisture of combined zeal and nervousness, "is obtained from the bodies of small American insects."

"Are the home-bred variety no use?" enquired a funny man in the bored tones of one who performs an obvious duty.

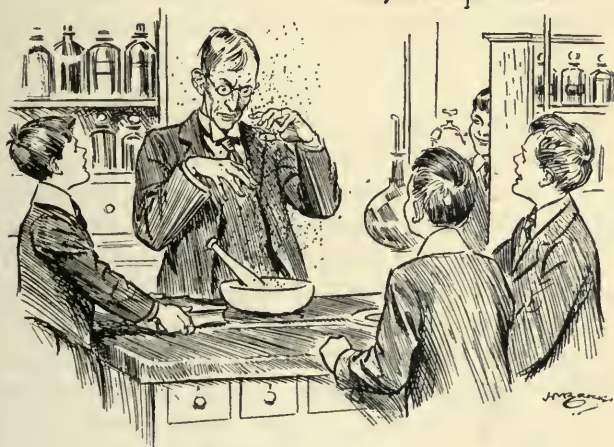
"The home-bred variety of what?" asked this most innocent of masters.

Before, however, the humorist could clinch the jest, Saunders had seized his chance. Taking up

a heavy Manual of Chemistry, he slammed it down so close to the scarlet grains that they flew up in the air and mostly adhered to the moist features of the earnest Science Master. His face had an appearance of being pitted with the bites of innumerable small American or home-bred insects.

"Who did that?" he angrily enquired.

"They flew up in the air"



"I did, sir," replied Saunders with a new sense of pride as he felt everybody's eye upon him.

Mr. Green's face cleared, so far as its colour allowed. "Ah, Saunders," he said in a gentler, almost loving voice. "It was very careless indeed: very. If it had been a less quiet and industrious boy, I should have thought that it was done on purpose."

Saunders paled visibly; longed to say, "It

was ”; had a sudden surge of his old timidity; grew red again; and whilst he thus hesitated, Mr. Green, with a muttered order to go on working, left the room for purposes of dye-removal. Saunders was too late.

“ Quiet boy ! ” “ Industrious little darling ! ” “ Dirty little greaser ! ” came as a mixed chorus to his ears.

Nobody knew what fierce thoughts against the forgiving Mr. Green arose in his foiled breast.

IV

When masters leave, and the School-paper’s editor is seeking desperately for something kind to say, it will often be found that the notice ends, “ Mr. Soandso has always identified himself closely with every form of School athletics.”

That never could be written about Mr. Green by even the most flowery of journalists.

Mr. Green—to be blunt—was no good at games. Finding that all the younger masters spent their half holidays on either the river or the field, he preferred upon arrival to select the latter. Oars, he knew from experience, had a deceitful habit of suddenly knocking you out at an unsuspected moment, and rivers were such damp affairs. . . . True, he had never played football or cricket in his boyish days at the South Sydenham Technical and Science College; but either game seemed to him almost absurdly easy. It could not be difficult, at thirty-three, to kick or strike a ball harder than

a pack of boys. Mr. Green went to the local outfitter and bought what was described as a "complete athletic outfit," including a striped scarf of imaginative colours. Arrayed in this (but discarding the cap, which seemed to give him something of a rakish air), he had turned out for a game of cricket on his second Saturday at Sherborough and had excited instant admiration, swelling almost to applause.

Both these, however, ceased so soon as play began.

Perhaps Mr. Green, peering over his glasses in bland confidence, would have found cricket an easier game if the bowler had been willing to aim at the wicket. This the Science Master had always understood to be the whole point of the game. In fact, he was for that very reason holding his bat firmly in front of the three sticks. The bowler, however,—whether from stupidity or lack of skill (for Mr. Green could not decide)—appeared to aim only at his legs. . . . These were long; and as Mr. Green explained afterwards to a sympathetic audience of young masters in the Common Room, the pads provided "proved totally inadequate for purposes of leg-protection."

It would have been a relief to get out, but the bowler's erratic aim made that impossible. When the stupid boy had struck him five times in succession on the upper leg, Mr. Green deliberately turned and knocked down his wicket, which he understood to be the cricketer's method of throwing up the sponge. The applause earned by this sporting and unselfish act was indeed terrific.

Although the complete athletic outfit included "cap, with tassel, one," he decided, next term, he would not try football, nor did he risk his legs upon the cricket field again, though not infrequently invited by the younger boys.

Hence it came to pass that, having resolved to do something in duty bound for Sherborough sport, he specialized in a department where he had no rivals. To return to our journalistic tag, he "identified himself" with the School swimming.

Not that he ever swam, himself, at the appointed times. Perhaps he was afraid of being splashed or submarined; perhaps he thought it would lack dignity:—whatever the cause, he never bathed among the boys. It was confidently stated that he could often be heard during school hours, by those in an adjoining class-room, swimming with a firm swish suggesting record pace; but no one had ever actually seen him enter or emerge. Rumour spread rapidly, as is its way at School. Mr. Green's interest in the swimming and in that alone suggested countless stories. The least improbable and most generally believed was that though too nervous to appear in public, he was, (as any ass might chance to be,) a really first-rate swimmer. Some said that he had won his Blue or whatever colour is assigned to sporting heroes at South Sydenham.

Given authority by so much alleged glory, he would sit close upon the edge, perched on a bench that he had caused to be screwed to the floor for that very purpose, and—almost hanging over the

deep end—would throw out from that point of vantage copious advice on dive or stroke to those who needed it and not a few who didn't.

It cannot be said that, for so great an expert, his advice was very novel or extremely varied.

"Long and slo-ow," he would chant, and then, "Kick *out*!" "Kick out, Erskine!" "Long and slow there, Benson: long and slo-ow!"

When the boys emerged to dress, he would smile deprecatingly,—as though to say, "Delighted! I've done nothing!"—and then walk delicately out, keeping a safe distance always from the edge in case of accident or purpose.

Thereafter, often, for some minutes there would issue strange sounds from the line of boys within the swimming bath.

"Long and slow! Kick *out*! Long and slo-ow!"

V

No more need be said to explain why Saunders, having failed miserably in his campaign against old Gangrene in the Science Lab, had no great difficulty in deciding where next to attack him. Only in two places was he seen sufficiently in public.

That evening, when everybody else was out upon the field, Saunders was busily employed inside the swimming bath.

At first sight his work might seem purposeless, for having taken out certain screws, he immediately replaced them. Perhaps, however, he put them back rather more loosely. . . .

Be that how it may, he certainly left the building with that contented smile which comes only from good work well done,—or from dirty work carried out according to desire.

VI

The bath was open in half-hourly periods from 2.30 on, so far as work permitted, and Mr. Green had announced that, for beginners, he would be always in attendance at the first.

So, the next day, was Saunders. . . .

Saunders was naturally excited. Even for a boy more used to what nurses know as mischief, the idea of plunging a master publicly into the swimming bath was near the limit of audacity: and Saunders was a quiet, a good boy.

There was, he reflected with nervous satisfaction, bound to be a tremendous row. Green would be immensely sick. Enquiries would be made, of course, for even a casual inspection would show that the clamps had been loosened from the duck-board, and when it was found to be Saunders—Saunders, the virtuous, the greaser!—he would certainly be thought a sportsman. Filled with such cheery forebodings, he stripped quickly, took a header in, and prepared from a convenient standpoint to enjoy developments.

Old Gangrene was not at present putting any forward pressure on the bench. He was sitting firm upon its centre, looking back along the row of rapidly undressing boys, with a word of kindly,

and (he felt sure) appreciated encouragement to those who were (in his opinion) little more than learners. So far the form rested solidly on its four feet and needed no clamps, no screws, as assistance.

Presently Langford, having got his clothes off, strolled up and sat beside the Science Master before plunging in. Saunders wondered how he would feel if he only knew the facts and this thought flattered him. At the same time he was cross with Langford. There were plenty of other chances for his pet hobby of ragging the master by a polite and in fact over-courteous interest in all he said, whilst his added weight, plumb in the centre, might easily prevent the bench from toppling even when old Gangrene finally leant forward.

"And how are your pupils getting on, sir?" opened Langford with a broad wink at some pal in the bath below.

"Most of those who are bathing at this moment are making satisfactory progress," answered Mr. Green, much flattered by this interest which proved appreciation.

"Burton there swims creditably, sir," Langford replied. (He always used, on these occasions, the beautiful English of the Victorian child-book.)

"Burton will soon be able to pass out of my hands." The instructor pointed proudly to a boy who had never been in any need of coming into them.

"Do you not find," articulated precisely the young searcher after knowledge, "that it is extremely difficult, sir, to judge the appropriate words of instruction for each individual case?"

Mr. Green waved this difficulty aside. "No, no,—not to *me*. So many young swimmers have passed through my hands that I know their faults through and through. Look at Mildmay there, now!"

He pointed excitedly, leaning forward at a precarious angle, and Saunders (now shivering with inaction in cold water, yet nervous of missing the splash) noted with anger that only the solid bulk of Langford, still sitting erect, retained the bench in its position.

"You will always find," went on the swimming expert enthusiastically, "that a novice moves with too short and quick a sweep. . . . No, no, Mildmay," (and he gesticulated mildly in graceless imitation of a swimmer's stroke,) "long and slow, sir: long and slo-ow!"

Langford had gained what he set out to hear. Contentedly, and with a final even broader wink, he stood up suddenly and dived gracefully into the water.

Mr. Green—although with less grace—did the same thing just one second later.

The bench followed both.

At once everything was uproar. Mr. Green, like all strong swimmers, created a great splashing. His arm, thrown out wildly, struck the bench. He bellowed in inarticulate alarm.

"Long and slow, sir!" shouted Langford. "Long and slo-ow!"

Anid peals of laughter everyone took up the immemorial chant.



'Mr Green...
did the same'

" Long and slo-ow ! Long and slo-ow ! " echoed and re-echoed the bath-walls, varied only by : " Kick out ! " It was a glorious and priceless rag.

Meanwhile, Mr. Green, the victim of a fuggy boyhood at South Sydenham's day college, proved in a spirit of appropriate science the falseness of a theory that drowning men come up only thrice.

It was, in fact, at the moment when for the fourth time he emerged like Venus from the waves of his own causing,—spluttering cascades of water from his gibbering mouth,—the spectacles aslant across his forehead,—that Saunders, stung by late Remorse, realized the awful truth at last.

" I say," he shrieked above the din of laughter, "*he can't swim ! He's drowning !*"

To Langford's credit be it said that, always dashing, he was first at hand and with the help of others dragged from the depths a struggling, panic-stricken, half-drowned remnant of a swimming expert.

Saunders, overcome now with the grandeur of his deed, hurried anxiously out of the water to make sure that all was not indeed over with its victim. This last, stunned by the reaction from his peril, lay absolutely still as though unconscious. For a few seconds there was a deep, ghastly silence in the building ; all the more awful by contrast with the gay, heartless laughter that had sounded hollow but a short time ago. Nothing was heard except the gentle plash of water as it coursed from Mr. Green's clothing back into the bath again.

Then, as blood began to light up the yellow of

his face once more, Anger suddenly usurped the place of Fear. He raised himself with a groan, and to the secret relief of all sat up, his legs still on the dripping floor. He pointed a fierce denunciatory finger in front of him. Welcome speech came from the Apparently Drowned.



"I shall report you
to the head master—Langford"

"I shall report *you*," he said, "to the Head Master,—Langford!"

VII

Saunders knocked timidly but with pride at the Head Master's door.

At first it had been a hard blow when his dare-devil exploit was ascribed, even by its victim, to a boy who—so far from toiling for an hour with clamps and screws—had done nothing but get up suddenly from an already loosened bench. Now, however, he saw that everything had worked for good. Not only would he get the credit of the deed and prove for ever that he did not grease to old Gangrene, but he would also be considered a great sport for owning up and getting Langford off his punishment. All the School, at present, was praising this as “Langford’s best.” What Langford himself said about it Saunders had not so far heard. . . .

“Come in,” cried the Head in a slow, booming voice, and gazed up, with a look planned to be alarming, at the boy who entered.

When he saw that it was Saunders, his face softened. Excellent reports continued to come in about this boy. For some weeks he had planned a friendly chat with him but School business tended more and more to take time from the boys.

“Ah, Saunders,” he said affably. “Come in and sit down.” (This is a rare invitation to any one below the Upper Sixth.)

“No, sir,” stammered the other. “I—I’d rather stand. I want to tell you something, sir.” He took a gulp, avoided the Master’s eye, and plunged full tilt into the centre of his business. “You see, sir, Mr. Green went in the bath to-day.” (At this point the Head Master turned his eyes down for a moment, apparently to do no more than move a

paper weight.) "Well, Langford happened to be sitting on the form just then and got up suddenly before it happened, so as he's always in a row, Mr. Green naturally thought that it was him, but please, sir, it was *me*."

Interested in his story, he had forged along with-

"I want to tell you something, sir."



out embarrassment : but now, at its end, he stood feeling nervous and extremely foolish, before the Beak's astonished look. He could almost feel as a physical sensation the probing of the other's eyes.

"You, Saunders?"

"Yes, sir. I went——"

The Head Master, however, had heard quite

enough. He prided himself upon quick decisions guided by swift intuitions. It may be remembered, also, that he knew the characters of Langford and of Saunders as given him by their House Masters. . . . He held up his hand almost sternly.

"Whether, Saunders, you had some share in it or not I can't say of course; but Mr. Green's story makes it quite clear that it was Langford who actually pushed the bench forward and threw it in the water. It is therefore he who is to blame."

"No, sir," almost shouted Saunders, seeing his handicraft thus set to another's credit. "It was I who——"

"Saunders," again broke in the Head Master, though in a far more friendly voice; "I must refuse to listen to the accusation you alone make against yourself! Even on your own showing there are two boys concerned in this affair. One of them is Langford, a very straight boy, no doubt, but always in some row or other. The second is yourself and I have wanted for some time to congratulate you on the good reports you get from everyone who has to do with you."

He paused impressively, for such praise of a junior boy was rare indeed from him, and Saunders took the opportunity of trying once again. "But, sir, the bench——" he started.

The Head Master made a gesture of dismissing the whole topic. "I am always pleased," he said, "when a boy tries to shift the blame on to himself, and in your case I am not surprised. Perhaps, Saunders," he went on genially, "it is as well I

did not let you go on or we might have had our first misunderstanding, and on the score of strict veracity!" He smiled and muttered, half to himself, "*Splendide mendax*," as though the sound even of a tag in Latin gave him some pleasure that the boy before him was incapable of sharing. He nodded at the door. As Saunders, feeling dazed and oddly helpless, moved in obedience towards it, there came to him in the Head Master's most kindly tone: "Langford can *bear* a little trouble, Saunders: he is used to it! Perhaps you'll tell him that he's wanted here?"

VIII

"Well, it was worth it," Langford surprised Saunders by remarking. "While I'm getting my dozen, I shall think of the way those giglamps ebbed up and down on his red nose with every wave that struck him! And the real joke is," he concluded mirthfully: "I never really *tried* to do it!"

It takes an older man than Saunders, often, to resist the obvious but wrong remark.

"I *did*," he could not help saying dryly and he told his story. After all, though he had missed the punishment, he still might gain the honour.

What he actually gained was hardly less painful than what he had missed. Langford possessed an accurate and persevering boot.

"You little worm," he breathlessly ejaculated between kicks, "You do a thing like that and

then get out of it! You dirty little greaser!"—and panting but content, he went off to keep his appointment with the Head Master.

IX

Saunders lacked the great gift of perseverance. He lost heart and never tried again. He gave in tamely to his reputation and went on being virtuous.

The fact is, of course, though Saunders failed to see it, that though you can hang a dog to which you've given a bad name, the dog with a well-established good one can safely commit almost any kind of crime.

If a more moral Moral be demanded for this story, it lies in the fact that Saunders is a dull dog but a successful West-end surgeon, whilst Langford, in the intervals of acting as a city clerk, is the life and soul of a suburban lodging-house.

And Great-Aunt Amelia's oranges were often excellent.





EVERYONE has remarked how many great schools came into being about the year 1550. Sherborne was founded at that date exactly; Shrewsbury one year later; Christ's Hospital and Bedford in 1552. The next few years saw the birth of Rugby, Harrow, Repton, Uppingham, Felsted, and Tonbridge. All these, and doubtless many other great institutions, had come into existence before 1600.

On the face of it, however, there was no special magic in those fifty years, and just as fine a school could be founded in the nineteenth—or for that matter, the twentieth—as in the sixteenth century.

It was not, indeed, till 1880 that the Reverend Hamilton Tor was ready to launch Stretton on the world. For the purpose of making a great school, his firm ambition from the first, he saw no difference between the date 1550 and the date 1880,—except that he himself happened to be living at the

later time. To this last fact he attached great importance. . . . There was possibly one circumstance to be weighed against it. Stretton might and would, by its later birth, have the advantage of the Rev. H. Tor as its Head Master; at the same time it would be deprived of the hardly smaller blessings which spring from an old tradition. A new foundation starts with an assorted set of boys, usually all rather young, and has to make its code, its rules, its moral standard for itself; a boy coming into an old Public School finds himself instantly up against a vast, unyielding mass of Thou Shalts or Thou Shalt Nots, the unwritten principles of Loyalty and Honour handed down to him by the boys of centuries ago.

The Rev. H. Tor, not by any means a fool, recognized this fact. He was, however, a colossal egoist. He took about size ten in clerical felt hats. He said to himself, "What Public School boys could do, unthinkingly, in three hundred years, *I* can do easily, with thought, in three." He sat down solemnly and thought. He began in 1877 and thought for three hours daily, with a note-book handy.

In 1880 the School buildings at Stretton were formally opened by the Mayor of the nearest borough. His speech would have been more successful if he had not written it under the mistaken belief that he had been invited to open, as usual in that district, another brewery. . . . The discovery at the last moment that this time it was a school involved a great deal of impromptu alteration; and some of the more learned members of the audience, dons from

our ancient Universities, were puzzled by his closing hope that "Stretton would make good,—*good money and good beer!*—and a good reputation for the borough of its birth." This peroration he had arranged to read, after speaking from mere notes, and in his flurry he forgot to cut out the beer allusion, which he explained at the lunch as "a mere local pleasantry" that the reporters would oblige him by omitting.

Dr. Tor's oration, however, atoned for all by its impressiveness. It was delivered from a scarlet-covered platform outside the Speech Hall. Standing beneath a classic portico, himself in cap and gown, he would probably have recalled Cicero to anybody who had ever heard the latter. The sixty small boys who were to be and to make Stretton squirmed on their hard benches at the back of a fashionable cane-chair crowd. Some few of them were seventeen, tempted from old-established schools as Prefects by a lower fee, and they longed for the grey places that knew them no more. This new Head's ambitions for his school were just a bit too steep. . . .

Finally, with a grand classic gesture, he dragged down a piece of purple silk that hung behind him and revealed a polished panel of dark wood, wherein, gold-framed, were seen beneath a royal crown, (which puzzled everyone more even than the reference to beer,) countless paragraphs of gold print on a vellum background.

"*No traditions*, Ladies and Gentlemen!" he bellowed. "Let that sneer against the new school never be heard upon this site of Stretton; for here,

sheltered beneath these classic columns, shrined in a noble frame, printed in gold and vellum, *ære perennius* ; here—*here*——” (and he waved a hand backwards) “ here for all time are the immutable and fine traditions of this glorious School ; writings, the fruit of my long thought and reading, that unimaginative men may merely know as ‘ the School rules,’ but which I, and I know *you* too,” (he beamed upon the now almost delirious boys,) “ will honour and reverence, rather, as the Stretton Code.”

II

The Founder of Stretton had the satisfaction of seeing his school a success before he retired to a country vicarage in 1903. This was partly due to a real cleverness and above all to an untiring energy that lay beneath his surface absurdities and ever-increasing self-satisfaction ; but Old Boys who were there at the start have told me that partly also it was due to his first speech. These sixty boys, brought together at various ages from almost as many schools, had nothing in common, no loyalty, nothing to bind them, (for the “ Stretton Code ” was scarcely likely to succeed at first,) and during the first evening and next morning they had skulked about, mainly alone, glaring at each other with mutual suspicion and dislike. The Prefects in particular had nothing they could share, except a grievance that each preferred keeping to himself. But as they staggered out, crushed and nerve-shaken, from Dr. Tor’s oration and unveiling of the

Stretton Code, everyone turned by an instinct to his neighbour and said, " Whew ! " " Lor' ! " or something similar ; and the ice thus broken, loud rose the unanimous opinion that the Head Master was a mark-one blighter. This, (so I am told,) formed a real link between them. . . .

It was not perhaps the exact link that Dr. Tor himself would have desired between his boys, but it was none the less a bond. Stretton avoided the one final disaster of disunion within itself. The Prefects united, took control, began to feel pride in success. Stretton was made.

On Dr. Tor's retirement he left behind him a school of two hundred boys and the reputation of being a bit of an old windbag but an excellent organizer and, (in everything except his dealings with the boys,) a jolly good Head Master.

III

Edward Shentshouse, who succeeded, was a very different type. Young, reserved, unsmiling, but sincere, original, and strong, he came to Stretton with a fine record as scholar, athlete and schoolmaster. He also possessed what is no bad thing in a schoolmaster ; a sense of Justice that amounted almost to a mania and would not allow him to punish any boy who claimed to have even what *seemed* a legitimate excuse. Only those were caned who owned to their own sins or were unmistakably convicted. This led to lucky escapes : but it avoided the per-

manent and degrading effect on boys of a real grievance.

Immediately the appointment was announced, before he had been even seen, his name was changed by the boys, first to "Hen-house;" then, that being found too long, to "Bug-run"; and finally abbreviated to "The Bug." By that last unsavoury and ill-odorous name he is still known, although he has long since become immensely popular. It is now spoken almost with a note of love. . . .

On taking over from the great Dr. Tor, (who secretly regretted that the Governing Body's final choice had fallen on a layman,) he had very strongly impressed upon him the importance of the Stretton Code, which the outgoing Head Master now first invested with the more self-flattering name of "Founder's Statutes."

"You must please understand quite clearly, Mr.—er—Shentshouse," he said, leaning back in his official arm-chair, folding his hands before him, and coldly fixing with his eyes the young man seated on a stiff-backed chair hitherto reserved for Prefects or boys not summoned for actual offence,—“there must be no mistake upon this point—that these rules or regulations, which are—er—known as ‘Founder's Statutes,’ must be regarded as final and immutable. There are no less than one hundred and twenty-four of them, so that they ought to cover most cases that can ever arise for consideration!” He smiled condescendingly. Had he not thought for three years? . . .

“But is that possible?” the Head Master Elect

ventured to put in. "Can *any* code cover all future cases?"

"I don't care whether it's possible or not," replied the other, almost fiercely, "but I have anyhow achieved it. For twenty-three years I have conducted this School in accordance with these rules—not a single addition, not a single erasure—and I hope with a certain measure of success."

"Certainly, certainly," the newcomer hurriedly remarked. (Dr. Tor had already been elected to the Governing Body.)

But he knew boys, and had—so soon—his doubts.

IV

The new Head loyally tried, as a matter not only of policy but of politeness, to run Stretton in accordance with its Founder's Statutes. He was largely helped in this by finding, only twenty years after Dr. Tor's oration, a genuine and universal pride among the boys in belonging to a school which, though new, had "permanent traditions." This idea, he soon learnt, covered a multitude of inconsistencies,—and even changes. . . . There was also great merit in Rule 86 which ran: "Any conduct which the Head Master considers subversive of discipline or morale will be severely dealt with." Rule 86 really covered more ground than all the other hundred and twenty-three together. . . .

Like all new brooms, he found odd things in unexpected corners, and one of these referred actually to the Founder's Statutes. Dr. Tor had referred to

them as being one hundred and twenty-four in number and this was the general impression; but whilst examining them closely and making a manuscript copy for his private use, Mr. Shentshouse had made a curious discovery, the day before the boys returned for the first day of his first term at Stretton.

Rule 124 ended pompously, in its magnificence of gold and vellum: "These Rules and Statutes will be binding on all Masters or boys who at any time may be in any capacity attached to Stretton"—words final enough in their sound: but underneath, still in fine gold, appeared: "*Rule 125: Any . . .*"!

The rest had been hidden by a gilt slip beneath the glass, sloped upwards to the right.

What was Rule 125? And had it been hidden purposely, on second thoughts, or had it been covered by a careless framer before being let into its ornamental panel?

The new Head did not ask the Founder. He was content to leave fairly well alone. One hundred and twenty-four of these Statutes were handsomely enough.

By playing subtly on the Strettonian idea of permanence whenever he effected change, and by a skilful but free use of Rule 86, he managed to get very much his own line of action while following slavishly the words of Dr. Tor, who visited the School from time to time and beamed upon him condescendingly as a pale copyist of his own marvellous brain-wave's production.

This went on for eleven years, years full of new

prosperity for Stretton, and Mr. Shentshouse would have submitted to such a slight inconvenience until the end, (so long as he got peace and his own way with Dr. Tor,) but for two things which combined with the War to make 1914 a true *Annus mirabilis* or year of wonder.

Dr. Tor passed peacefully away in January, bequeathing to the School a colossal frock-coat statue of himself in stone. And in May of the same historic year Sealyham arrived at Stretton.

V

Sealyham was not a dog, despite his name, soon shortened into "Tyke." He was a boy; a boy with eyes of dangerous innocence and brightness: a boy with that dazed air and studied politeness which masters of experience mistrust much more than the most brazen impudence.

Looking around at Stretton with a humorous gaze of good-natured criticism—seeking merely whom he might devour, and (more especially) whom not—he soon realized one tragic fact. He had come to Stretton a dozen years too late. There might be some fun to be got out of the Bug, but he was of a dangerous type. The Bug had humour and he seldom showed it. Also he looked through you and saw everything *en route*. These things were set down by the expert Sealyham as risks of the first water. And yet—and yet the man's almost grim self-control was hideously tempting. . . .!

But to have been at Stretton under Dr. Tor,—

that would indeed, from all he heard, have been a privilege, a joy, a rag beyond belief. Even his silly statue cheered you up on a wet day. Well, that was not to be, but there remained a monument to the old man's pomposity in these gold-printed Statutes, which he had been made to stand and read for set periods on the first three days of term. They seemed still to be taken seriously.

Surely there was something to be got from them?

Tongue in cheek, he set himself at any rate to try.

Strettonians of standing,—those superb colourmen who are allowed to wear a turn-up to their trousers,—were surprised to see a new boy studying the Founder's Statutes even after the three days set aside for all new kids to perform that necessary duty. They were rather shocked, (for secretly, of course, beneath the traditional respect, they all remembered their original amusement at the gold and vellum exhibition). Also they were not a little scornful.

"The rotten little blighter must be beastly nervous about his own dirty skin," laughed Denton bitterly. "Imagine taking all that trouble to steer free of punishments !"

"Yes," replied Bruce, who as Head Boy might have been expected to be above such trifles. "And I bet he gets them too ! The Bug simply hates a greaser."

But of course neither of them then knew Sealyham.

VI

Sealyham kept himself oddly to himself. He was of those who believe that slowly gained friends are the longest kept. Also he could not afford, for *his* idea of life and happiness, to have fools in the circle of his intimates. Among the other new boys his study of the Statutes made a bad impression; and as he on his part made no effort at advances, they left him very much to his devices.

It is a tribute to Experience and Age that the first at Stretton to suspect the exact nature of these last was the Head himself.

In the fourth week of this Summer Term, Sealyham was sent up by his House Master with a note to explain that "he habitually defies all rules: either he is intensely stupid or he is insubordinate to a dangerous degree." The Bug, having listened with patience and apparent sympathy to the new boy's difficulties, formed the opinion that neither explanation was correct. He diagnosed Sealyham correctly as a known type,—the School funny man. He said, indeed, so much.

"The idea I get of you, Sealyham, is that you are trying to be funny at the expense of our oldest and most typical School institution: the Founder's rules or Statutes."

"No, sir, indeed I am not." The air of hurt innocence was quite a work of art.

"The idea I get," went on Mr. Shentshouse grimly, "is that you would not have so much difficulty in making your behaviour fit in with the

Statutes, if you wrote certain of them—say,” (and he glanced at his handwritten copy,) “Numbers 17, 94, and 116,—out for me fifty times, and thus learnt them better.”

“But, sir,” almost cried the poor lad, now more injured even than before, “I *have* tried, honestly. I know them very well already. Any one will tell you I spent extra days at them after the three that we all *had* to. Number 17 is ‘Every boy, on passing a Master, will raise his hand to his head-wear, of which he will lift the brim or peak without actually removing the hat or cap from his head.’”

The Head Master, surprised and rather at a loss, found this to be exact. “I *do* know them, sir,” pleaded Sealyham shrilly.

“Yes, yes,” the other said hurriedly, “you know them. . . . And yet,” he went on, in sudden triumph, seeing the line he must take, “in spite of this Statute or rule, Mr. Cross complains that you habitually pass him without notice.” He glared fiercely at this tiresome little boy now gazing back, as the song says, “with wonder in his eyes.”

“But, sir,” replied Sealyham in a tone of lowered horror, “there is Founder’s Statute number 121.”

The Head Master, with a growing irritation that somehow puzzled him, turned up that number and read this, half aloud :

“ ‘Masters at all times should remember that they are, no less than the boys, members of this great Foundation. They must in all things set the example, take the lead, as befits their superior position. The boys, in turn, must follow, confident that they can

copy without danger and indeed imitate to their life-long advantage.' "

He looked up—almost savagely by now—at Sealyham. That innocent was gazing, sadly pensive and with eyes of reproach, at this Head Master who had forgotten so truly beautiful a Founder's Statute.

"I was waiting, sir," he said submissively, "for Mr. Cross, as a master, to make the first move. . . . And there are Statutes against 94 and 116 exactly the same way."

Mr. Shentshouse gazed down, baffled for a moment, and his eyes fell on the House Master's writing: "Either he is intensely stupid or——"

For the first time in nearly twenty years as a schoolmaster, he felt, for some odd reason, that he was on the verge of a real loss of temper with a boy. Sooner than that, he must get rid of him, even unpunished.

"I do not know, Sealyham," he said, taking from Mr. Cross a cue that he felt certain was not right, "whether you are very stupid or what you are. You seem to know the School rules and yet not to obey them. I refuse to argue about special paragraphs. It is a code that has sufficed for Stretton during thirty years and it must do for you. I strongly suspect, as I have said, that you are trying to be funny. You *may*, however, be an actual fool. I don't wish to do an injustice, but don't come up to me again. Now you can go."

"Oh, *thank* you, sir!" cried Sealyham, fervent and devout. He went out, closing the door with politely gradual movements; and through its final

crack he murmured, " Good-night, sir," as though to prove that he bore no ill-will.

" 'M ! " was the Head Master's only spoken comment. He wrote, however, on his memo-block the few words, " Sealyham, Cross's House. Enquire."

And Sealyham, relaxing his face at last upon the mat outside, also had his thoughts. Dangerous, yes. . . . Not by any means a fool, in spite of this jolly No-Injustice notion. . . . Suspicious, quite, already. . . . Could be very fierce. . . . More care would be needed in the future. . . .

But—well, how thoroughly worth while !

VII

Sealyham duly drew in his wings just a little, but though his flights in the next months were less ambitious, they were fairly frequent. Not only did he come up before the Head again : he came five times in his first three terms. His new plan was, however, to offend against only one Statute—not three, as on the first experiment—and always to have one that he could definitely quote against it.

Edward Shentshouse, a sportsman above everything, found his first anger changing to admiration, then to respect, and finally almost to affection. On no single occasion had it been possible to punish the boy without a certain risk of the fatal charge that it had been unjust, for Sealyham never again risked a quibble so flimsy as the Master-capping-a-boy pretext. There were plenty of inconsistencies in Dr. Tor's long document, but—and hence came the

Bug's admiration—no boy until now had used them. Yes, Sealyham with his bright, puzzled, guileless eyes—Sealyham was a great sportsman after his own fashion!

Yet none the less, in a manner highly reprehensible for a Head Master, the equally sporting Bug longed ardently to bowl him clean out, beyond appeal, and give him the good beating that his future welfare so clearly demanded.

VIII

Sealyham's fourth term was only three days old when Fate seemed literally to throw at Mr. Shentshouse the very opportunity which he desired.

Strolling across to Chapel, with time to spare, on this first Monday morning, the Head Master of Stretton was astounded as he came around the corner of a hedge that runs from the Pavilion towards the Chapel, to see a stone of some size whizz past only a few inches from his nose. A second later, as both reached the angle, Sealyham came into view: more ammunition held in his left hand. This he promptly dropped and very politely raised the peak (only) of his cap, exactly as desired by the late Dr. Tor. He looked a model boy.

"Sealyham, what was that stone?" the Head sternly enquired, finding it hard to hide the elation in his tones. Till the present moment his encounters with Sealyham had always been based on reports from Mr. Cross: now the boy was caught out in an actual offence. Till the present moment Sealyham



"Sealyham,"
what was that stone?"

had always fought on ground of his own careful choosing : now they met on equal terms.

Sealyham appeared in no dismay at all. He stood close on the edge of the lawn (forbidden, incidentally, for use by any except Prefects) and looked as innocent as ever.

"The stone, sir? I don't quite understand."

"My question was quite clear, Sealyham. I want no nonsense, please : we've had enough of that. You know quite well what I mean. What, exactly, did I ask? "

"You asked me what the stone *was*," answered the other, putting on the dazed air of a boy in form who has come up against a scientific poser.

Mr. Shentshouse changed the line of his attack. He wanted no geological doubts or discussions. He realized that he had chosen his words carelessly. With Sealyham one had to think ahead. And at this moment the cracked bell took on the hurried tone that warned loiterers they had got only sixty seconds more.

"Come, come, sir," he said, with some of the pomposity of his great predecessor; "why did you throw that stone? "

"I had no reason, sir," said the timid and subservient boy. "I was merely amusing myself."

"I see. And in that laudable endeavour I suppose it never occurs to you to consider the School rules? "

"School rules? Yes, sir. But there isn't any against throwing stones."

Not for the first time the Head Master cursed

those wondrous self-sufficing Statutes. "Not in so many words, Sealyham. No doubt you could find—and will!—a hundred things to do not mentioned actually. There is no rule, for instance, against setting fire to my waste-paper basket: no statute forbids drowning my daughters in the School swimming bath: our Founder never anticipated that you would dig a trench across the Cricket pitch——"

This flood of sarcasm was rather spoilt in its effect by the bell giving a last dismal clang, then stopping suddenly, followed by the sound of the great door being closed and bolted against all late-comers.

"*Will* you give me an excuse, sir?" asked this law-abiding, nervous Sealyham, as he glanced round at it.

The Head glared at him and ignored this natural request. "There is a rule," he said hurriedly and with some inconsequence, "against damaging the site or buildings."

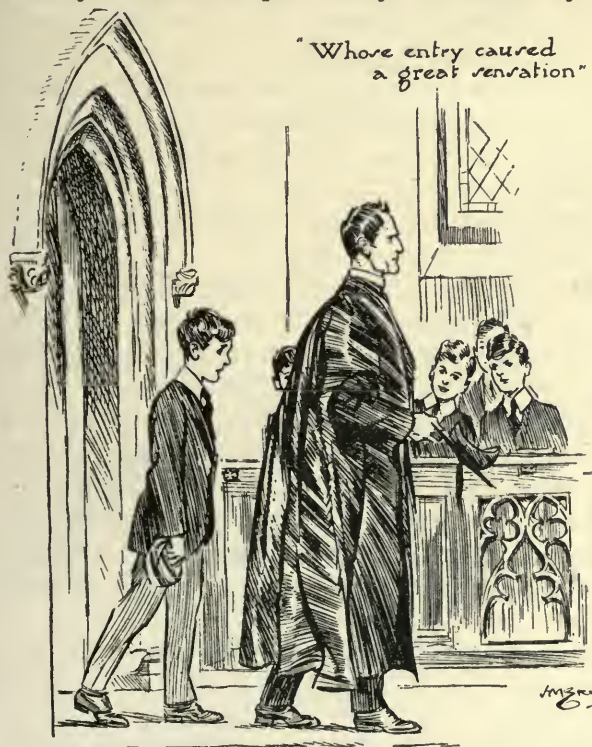
"But, sir, I didn't think a stone could really harm a hedge."

"—And Rule 86 forbids 'all conduct subversive of discipline or morale.' I suppose you think that to throw stones at the Head Master——"

"Honestly, sir," interrupted Sealyham, in a hurt voice, "if I'd known you were coming, I'd have let it go the other way. But anyhow I aimed it at the hedge. I didn't think that *could* be bad for discipline. The Statutes always seem so vague, sir, I can't understand them."

The Head Master felt all his old anger of two terms back rising. "Very well," he said abruptly. "You

always have an excellent excuse! Come into Chapel through the Vestry. You have made me late already." He stamped away, followed by the



meek stone-thrower, whose entry caused a great sensation. Sealyham at this time was slowly building up what he probably would have called his reputation. . . .

It was whilst the Head Boy, Bruce, was reading the Lessons that a very unwelcome thought from the

outer world came so insistently to the Head Master that it actually took his attention from the words being spoken. He flushed—was it with guilt or with anger at his own omission? For what he had realized, at so unseemly a moment, was the fact that Sealyham, when he had scored him off and got away scot free by his brazen pretences, could all the time have been caught out and punished for being on forbidden grass !

To take notice of this now would be so ignoble as to seem a confession of defeat.

None the less, this discovery, together with Sealyham's insistence and the fact that it was early morning, may possibly account for the Head Master being (so to speak) hustled into an action which he would probably not have performed upon a little further thought. He went straight back to his study after Chapel, and totally forgetting the thousand and one more important contingencies that might some day dictate the terms of that hidden last Statute, he wrote and posted a notice as follows :

FOUNDER'S STATUTES

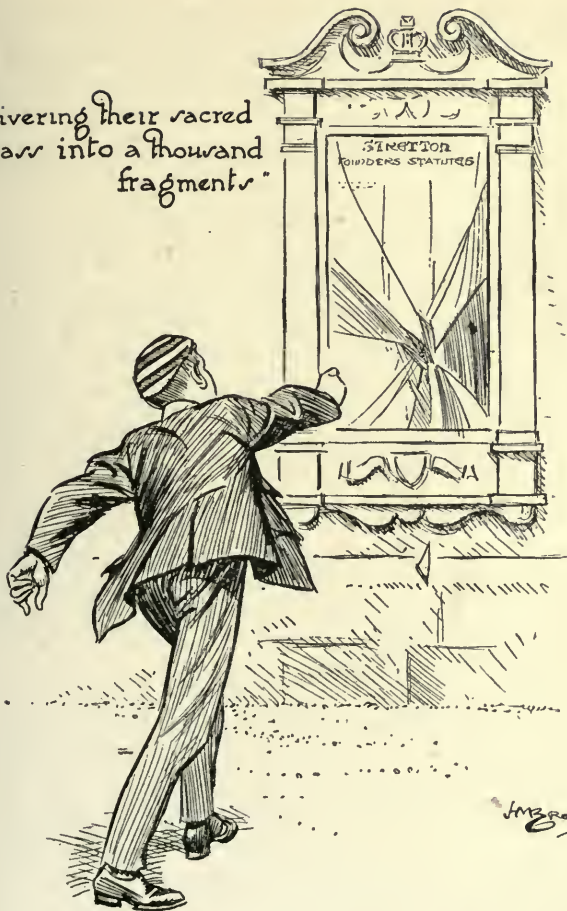
Notice

Rule number 125 will be taken in future to run as follows :

“ Any boy found throwing stones will be severely punished.”

E. SHENTSHOUSE
Head Master.

"Shivering their sacred
glass into a thousand
fragments"



IX

It was at this point that Sealyham first showed his brilliance by doing a thing which managed to surprise boys and Head Master equally. This, be it said, is never very easy.

He had been two terms and a bit at Stretton; broken rules freely; thoroughly enjoyed himself; and never yet been punished. Mr. Shentshouse looked on him as such a clever lawyer that, though his pursuit was worth while on that account, he probably never would be fairly caught. The bulk of the School had begun by now to notice Sealyham and formed very much the same opinion. He was summed up as "pretty cute," "an amusing bird," and — for some reason unexplained—"a sportsman."

Masters and boys were all pretty sure of one thing : that his game was a deep one, and unless he lost his head badly or the Founder's Statutes were repealed, he would never do anything that could let him in obviously for a licking.

Now what Sealyham actually did was this.

About four hours after his argument with the Bug on stone-throwing; three and a half after the notice against that pastime had been posted; at an hour when everybody was about, between two periods of school; he slowly stooped to the ground, picked up a stone, and flung it violently at the gold and vellum Founder's Statutes, shivering their sacred glass into a thousand fragments.

X

The three hundred boys, who by now formed the community of Stretton, had never, even in Chapel, been so absolutely silent. Every one of them waited tensely for the Bug's first word. The whole Speech Hall was packed with the electric feeling that comes only from a first-class row.

The end, of course, was obvious. Mr. Shentshouse had put no trust in the dangerous element of surprise. Nobody believed that Sealyham was going to be sacked; nobody imagined that he was going to escape. Behind the Bug stood the Head Boy. In front of both, upon the table, lay—for everyone's inspection—a birch-rod. Sealyham, still dazed and puzzled, sat in the front row of the spectators, just below the gangway steps; everybody else's eyes upon him, his own fixed reproachfully upon the Head.

The absence of suspense, however, far from lessening the thrill, increased it. A row that holds a prospect of somebody's expulsion can hardly be a pleasure to anyone at all: a row that clearly is to end in that unheard-of thing at Stretton, a public birching, and with Sealyham of everyone as hero—this was indeed a real sensation, a colossal rag!

The Head Master, however, had never looked more serious than at this moment.

"The old boy feels it," murmured somebody in the back rows, but those around him cried out, "'Ssh!" At no cost must a word of this be lost. The comment could come later.

"I have taken a step to-day," he began, in very low tones, "that has never, I am glad to say, been necessary till now in all my eleven years here as Head Master;" and always in a manner full of solemn responsibility, he went on to sketch the history of this great School at Stretton. He showed how it had been founded on the idea of a permanent tradition that should spring into being with the School's first day. He admitted freely that there were,—how could there not be?—omissions in this wonderful code drawn up by their great Founder, Dr. Tor. For thirty-five years, none the less, the School had obeyed, revered, and guided all its being by, those very Statutes. Then, however, had arrived a boy who (so it seemed to him) had set himself from his first day to throw them into contempt, ridicule, and disrepute.

"At first," he went on, speaking more after his own easy manner, "I must confess that I had, though I daresay I oughtn't to have had, a sort of sneaking sympathy with what was after all merely a small boy's attempt to 'try it on'—naturally!—with a new Head Master or to score off an institution that possibly he was too young to value at its proper worth. But when——" and, very worried-looking once again, the Head proceeded to catalogue the sins of Sealyham, capped by his deliberate breach of a Statute scarcely dry upon the paper,—a Statute made necessary by *his* offence of the same day—and the cold-blooded breaking of that great Stretton institution, Founder's Statutes.

"When," he concluded, "it comes to so long-

planned and obvious a defiance of the whole system of school discipline, the question naturally arose whether such a boy is fit, or should be permitted, to remain at Stretton. He is, however, only a few months over fifteen and I am extremely unwilling to handicap him through life with the disgrace of expulsion, especially for offences which, I freely admit, fatal as they are to all good order, hold no moral infamy attached and seem to spring more from the love of a good 'lark' than of anything."

He pulled himself up as he felt his secret half-sympathy with the Statute-breaker creeping in again at this unfitting moment. . . . His speech ended on a properly firm note. "None the less," he said sternly, "this sort of thing is fatal to the whole notion of school discipline. It strikes at both order and tradition. If this boy's example were allowed to spread, Stretton would become a rabble. I am therefore forced to inflict on him the severest punishment, short of expulsion, that it is in my power to give, and I have decided to adopt the rare and humiliating expedient of a public flogging. . . . Sealyham, come here! You will be flogged for general insubordination and breach of Rule number 125."

He took the birch-rod from the table. Sealyham, assuming an air of elaborate surprise, walked slowly up the steps. Mr. Shentshouse motioned to the Head Boy. Bruce, obviously coached in his duties, moved towards the victim. Everyone craned forward.

Suddenly it was observed that Sealyham, standing

so submissive and expectant, was after all not going to prove a tame disappointment. He began timidly, almost with a stutter, to protest.

"B—but, sir,—aren't I going to be allowed to say anything at all?" Bruce, close beside him, hesitated.

So did the Head Master, thinking swiftly, torn by two strong feelings. On the one side his old typical desire to avoid at all costs anything that possibly could even seem unjust: on the other a certainty, born of experience, that if he allowed this boy to utter one word, he was lost. . . .

"No," he answered firmly. "Not one word," He signalled once again to Bruce.

Sealyham's superbly dramatic look of mingled horror and pious martyrdom was long remembered by all present. Then, as Bruce laid hands upon him, he suddenly drew himself up in a heroic attitude. All his old timid submissiveness fell from him. He spoke with a new clearness and authority.

"As a Strettonian," he shouted, "I claim the right to lay a written petition before the Head Master." He motioned the officious Head Boy aside almost rudely and drew a document from his breast-pocket.

Mr. Shentshouse had never heard of this alleged "right" among the School traditions (as, indeed, had no one else): but the word Strettonian made an urgent appeal; the fear that refusal might seem an injustice became now more strong; and in the whole idea of a written petition there was a certain dignity, a ritual, that touched a chord somewhere

deep down in his nature. And after all a written thing was different, he need not read it if it proved a rag. . . .



"He wagged the trailing charter to and fro before him"

"Very well, Sealyham," he said.
One moment later he repented.

Sealyham at this point let loose the second of those impudent surprises for which he soon was to become famous. Solemn as a hangman, he unrolled a

dossier composed of foolscap gummed together, possibly a yard in length. A red seal glinted at the foot of it. He set his legs apart, and started.

“ Sir——” He waggled the trailing charter to and fro before him.

There was a titter, hurriedly suppressed.

“ Give it to me, Sealyham.” Nobody had ever heard the calm Bug shout before. “ No nonsense now, I warn you.”

“ Sir,” almost sobbed Sealyham in hurt amazement and the sense of being wronged, “ it is all serious. Read and see, sir.” He handed it across. “ I only ask for justice.”

The Head Master read, casting his eye quickly down the many paragraphs, and what he duly saw seemed almost visibly to cause him surprise.

“ ’M? ’M? ” he murmured doubtfully, half to himself. Then, turning to the expectant School: “ As this rather extraordinary document,” (he held it out scornfully: thus, he flattered himself, getting against Sealyham the laugh which resulted,) “ refers to the whole School and its traditions, I think it only fair to read out that part which really affects my action at the moment. It is this ” (he looked down the long paper and began to read mid-way):

“ Apart from these arguments, which I believe to be impossible to properly answer except by the unjust use of force, I plead a Founder’s Statute which has lately fallen into disuse through an unlucky error but which was

told me by my uncle, *viz.* and namely that any new boy," (the Head Master read this bit very slowly, in a tone of amazed disbelief,) "who has been two terms at Stretton without a punishment can escape his first punishment by claiming 'First Offence.' "

Then, not noticing the words that he had reached, he read unthinkingly what lay, thrice underlined, between two brackets :

" This is the *old* Rule Number 125."

There was a roar of laughter, which could not be suppressed. There was something priceless in this Sealyham, accused under an "old" Founder's Statute, Rule 125, made up by the Head Master, urging in his defence a different version, equally just invented—but invented by himself !

Sealyham alone remained serious, seeming puzzled at the general merriment. Even the Head Master smiled : this boy had humour, certainly, mixed with his daring : but under his amusement lay a little grimness. Sealyham no doubt had changed the spirit of this meeting, but it must have only one conclusion. Discipline demanded nothing less. He held up his hand for silence.

" Luckily," he said, with one of his rare smiles, " the accuracy of Sealyham's uncle can be tested. This could not have been done except for Sealyham's own action. The frame of the Statutes has, however, had to be removed from its panel before the glass could be repaired. It is now lying on my study table. Bruce, will you very kindly fetch it ? "

As the Head of the School left, Mr. Shentshouse proceeded: "If, Sealyham, Rule Number 125 is as your uncle told you," (nobody had ever heard about this O. S. uncle,) "justice of course demands that you escape your punishment. It is, however, entirely off the point whether Rule 125 refers to stone-throwing or not. If it refers to anything *except* this alleged tradition about 'First Offence,' I shall proceed to birch you, and none the more gently for this added insolence." He tapped the imposing petition.

If there had been excitement before, there can be no word for the pent-up expectation as, under the Head's orders, Bruce proceeded carefully to remove the splintered bits of glass and then the wooden backing to the vellum and gold rules. He handed the sheet to Mr. Shentshouse. What would the long-hidden rule turn out to be?

No emotion could be traced on the Head Master's face, which was like a mask as he said, in lifeless tones:

"I regret to say the damp has got in and Rule Number 125 can no longer be deciphered."

This moment came as the climax of the meeting, or (as a humorist called it) "the close of a perfect rag." It surprised everyone—everyone, that is, except Sealyham, who had managed to see the rule, after careful backward pressure with a penknife on the glass, before writing his petition or even throwing the historic stone. . . .

"Three words, however," proceeded the Head, "are still legible. 'Any boy' . . . and then, some

way on, 'punishment'. . . . As these, so far, fall in with Sealyham's version of the Statute, I shall, sooner than do a possible injustice, remit or anyhow postpone his punishment."

At this point a ragged cheer began in the back rows and spread throughout the Hall. "Postponed punishment" is mere masters' talk for "a wash-out." Sealyham had triumphed in a super-rag. Sealyham was a humorist, a sportsman. And so, too, was the Bug. . . . He could, of course, easily have carried on.

This last looked angry for a moment, then the expression of amusement came into his face again. This boy Sealyham made some curious appeal to him; he was glad to be spared the nasty business of a public birching; he could remember how he, as a boy, would have enjoyed such a wholesale discomfiture of the Head Master;—and above everything he had just realized how this episode might not only end in lasting good for Stretton but even in his own final triumph over the ingenious Sealyham.

He held up his hand again.

"As," he said, with a distinct twinkle in his eye, "there has now arisen a controversy as to the last rule's wording, and as various other misunderstandings about the Statutes have occurred lately," (did he really glance at Sealyham?), "and as there is unfortunately a serious rent in the vellum on which they are printed, I think that, as Head Master, I shall only be acting as our great Founder, Dr. Tor, would have desired if, after thirty-five years, I bring

his Statutes into line with new needs, new conditions. I therefore propose to add a few new rules, without of course removing any, for they are the Stretton tradition, and to have them printed in such a way that they will go into the old frame in the familiar stone panel. And " (he ended, suddenly more human than any one had ever seen him), " as I intend to make these rules quite clear to the lowest intellect and utterly beyond all quibbles, I hope shortly to give my ingenious young friend Sealyham the caning that he has more than once thoroughly deserved."

XI

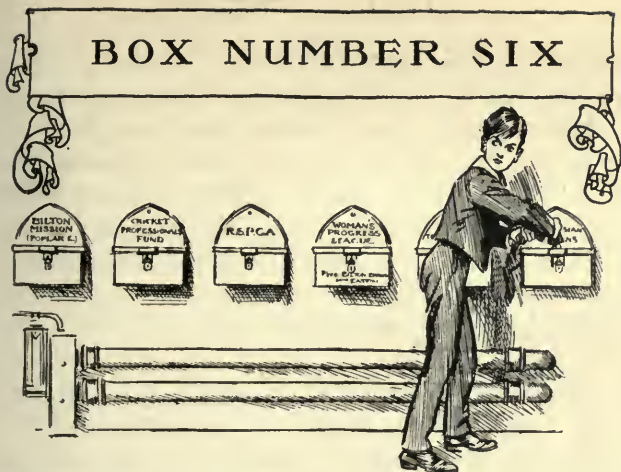
Those who know school life and its conditions will hardly need to be told that the Head Master realized his hope.

The rule on which he caught Sealyham was phrased as follows :

" Any boy arguing or making excuses, when brought up for a proved offence, will receive a severe punishment. . . ."

Head Masters are *ex hypothesi* superior to faults of human frailty, and Sealyham must therefore be mistaken when he declares that there was an ugly glint of triumph in the Bug's eye as he said, " That, Sealyham, is a Founder's Statute :—Rule One Hundred and Twenty-Five ! "

•



HE School House is easily the largest House at Bilton. It is even more easily the slackest. Every one admits the fact, but there is a certain difference of opinion as to the reason. Most people say that the House naturally suffers because the Head Master is too busy with School matters to pay much attention to the boys. Others, including the boys themselves, are of opinion that this is the sole advantage that the House possesses. . . .

The comment is unkind, but may very possibly be true. Dr. Easton, (he is one of those Head Masters who are very keen about the title Doctor,) was no doubt a wise enough choice as Head Master, from the point of view of the Governing Body which elected him. He is a good business man; an excellent scholar; and always knows how to tackle even the most difficult of parents. Unluckily, his knowledge of Human Nature does not extend to boys.

Anyone who doubts this last fact can satisfy himself by going no further into the School House than through the long corridor that leads from the boys' studies to the Dining Hall. One side is practically all given up to windows: the other is a solid wall, on which hang six small wooden boxes. Each has an inscription in big black-paint letters. Reading (as the illustrated papers say,) from left to right, these are as follows:

- (1) BILTON MISSION,
(POPLAR, E.).
- (2) CRICKET PROFESSIONALS' FUND.
- (3) R.S.P.C.A.
- (4) WOMAN'S PROGRESS LEAGUE,
(Pres., BILTON BRANCH: MRS. EASTON.)
- (5) BILTON VILLAGE TEMPERANCE BAND.
- (6) POLYNESIAN ORPHANS.

Each of these boxes,—even number 6,—has a narrow slit cut in its lid, as if to hint that money offerings should be inserted. This, however, except in the case of number 1 and 2, is scarcely ever done. . . . Anyone less an optimist or more a student of his boys than Dr. Easton would have guessed that any spare money in the House was more likely to go to the School Mission or the Cricket Pros than towards Woman's Progress or the Polynesian Orphans.

Substantial sums are collected each term for the first two objects, and a few pennies go from animal lovers to the R.S.P.C.A.; but neither Woman's

Progress nor the Temperance Band can ever have received much real assistance from the assortment of foreign coppers, trouser buttons, banana-skins, and other suitably narrow-shaped offerings from Bilton revealed at the very occasional opening of boxes 4 and 5. As to number 6, the House has notoriously harboured some odd people during the eight years of Dr. Easton's rule, but nobody has been found in all that time peculiar enough to drop a penny through the slit reserved for the benefit of Polynesian Orphans.

Dr. Easton, puzzled at this boycotting of a charity especially dear to his wife, has lost heart totally. For the last five and a half years box 6 has never been even opened,—or only once.

And hereby hangs this tale.

II

"It's just about the limit," exclaimed Dove violently.

No one in the House Prefects' study took any great amount of notice. Everybody was quite used to Dove. His name was the one gentle thing about him.

Presently Parker, (who always claimed the existence of some ancient School Statute by which Head Boys had first rights on the arm-chair and the fire,) lazily put down the Magazine that he was reading; yawned elaborately; and turned round till he faced Dove.

"What is just about the limit *now*?" he asked.

"Gore and Gwatkin," snapped out Dove almost before the Head Boy had finished.

Parker laughed uneasily. "I suppose you want *them* licked now?" he said. "That's the worst of new Prefects," he added with a pretence of weary superiority: "they'd always like to see about half the House go through it!"

"I'd like to see the *whole* House go through it, as they are at present," answered Dove with growing truculence.

His fellow-Prefects laughed delightedly. It is very easy,—if the truth be rude enough,—to seem a humorist by being truthful. They thought Dove splendid fun.

"I mean it," he went on, and all the other five now nudged each other, saying that old Dove was off again. "The House is absolutely rotten. I don't say there's anything wrong about it that couldn't easily be altered. We've good men in it at almost everything, but it's all gone—well, slack and sloppy. Old Easton's sloppy and *we're* the sloppiest of all. We just sit by the fire here and let things rattle along any old way that they like, or don't."

Parker stirred uneasily in front of the fire. Not only did he find the criticism rather personal, but also he was half-afraid that it was merely leading up to further trouble. Dove was a nuisance! Why couldn't he leave things alone? It had been so jolly, last year, being a House Prefect. The study had been a sort of snug little club-room, where they had all assembled after the day's work and sat

beside the fire and read:—all quite ideal until Dove's arrival. What did the fellow want? He'd already got seven fellows licked for various offences, all absolutely trivial: going out in lock-ups, talking at Prep after being told not to, and silly little private-schooly things like that, which he said "all showed slackness." That was all very well, so far;—probably it *was* a good thing to whack some one now and then, on principle; the custom had dropped out a bit in the School House; but it was quite easy to tell that the matter had gone far enough. Fellows were grumbling openly about it. If Dove had his way, the Prefects would become unpopular, and that sort of thing was horribly uncomfortable. . . . These First Eleven men were always far too rough-and-ready.

He decided that it would be best to meet the attack half-way. "By which free rendering of Cicero's second Philippic," he said, in his iciest Sixth-Form tone, at the end of Dove's excited speech, "you mean exactly——? Coming back, that is, to Gore and Gwatkin and their hideous offences!" The others sniggered at the Head Boy's wit.

Dove felt himself getting slightly red, which annoyed him intensely. He was himself utterly, almost painfully, sincere and any form of sarcasm or irony came as a real snub to him. He answered far more timidly, as the artful Head Boy had in fact expected. "There *are* no hideous offences," he began, "and I didn't mean it to be specially what you call a 'Philippic,' whatever that is (I'm

Army Class, you know!). But you must have noticed Gore and Gwatkin," and back on this safe ground, he grew more confident. His voice rose almost to its earlier note of fierceness.

"Oh yes, I've noticed Gore and Gwatkin," answered Parker. "They don't wash. But new kids never do."

This raised a laugh, being totally untrue but at the same time describing roughly the pair's general appearance. The other Prefects laughed contentedly. One of them threw down a book and went out along the study-corridor. All, clearly, regarded the topic as closed.

Dove, however, was of the breed that perseveres. "It's not only they're untidy, though they really *are* the most scrubby pair of sweeps that I've ever had the luck to see. That's bad enough. What I object to, isn't their appearance. It's their rotten pipsqueak *ways*."

"Pipsqueak," said Parker coldly, "means as little to me as Philippic does to you!" He felt that, for once, he had all the Prefects with him. Here was his chance to repress the far too active Dove.

That New Broom, however, was in truth "off again" and did not even notice the remark. "Why," he cried indignantly, "can't they be sweeps decently, if they must be sweeps at all? I can understand two inky little scallywags getting together and forming a sort of unholy alliance against every one and everything: but I can't understand the little blighters always having scraps between themselves, and *foul* scraps at that?"

‘Is *that* all it is?’ asked Parker, frankly relieved that it was nothing asking for his interference.

“Isn’t it enough?” said Dove, now thoroughly wound up. “After all, I suppose this IS a Public School, and we ARE the School House; or am I wrong and is it a bally girls’ Kindergarten run by women? What do you think the other Houses say when they see Gore and Gwatkin sneaking about each other (as they do) in form, yet always everywhere together? Gives a nice idea of life in this House, doesn’t it? And now, if you please, Gwatkin has sent a note to old Easton, saying that Gore ‘teases’ him,—teases!—and five minutes ago they went past this window arm in arm.”

“So that was what you called the limit,” Parker remarked slowly.

“Yes, and I suppose you’ll say it’s not a ‘hideous offence’ and that it doesn’t matter and all the rest of it?”

Parker smiled in a slow, irritating way. “I certainly don’t think it’s any of our business. *We* don’t have to bath the small boys! It’s not our business if they like to amuse themselves by fighting and making it up again daily in alternate doses.” The other Prefects kept up their policy of masterly inaction, and said nothing. They enjoyed the spectacle of the reformer’s energy getting a cold douche, and they secretly admired the Head Boy’s courage.

“Fighting,” cried Dove. “Yes! But sneaking, notes to the Head,—‘teasing’:—why, they make me sick. I wouldn’t mind if they *did* fight. They don’t. They slouch about the place together and

then crawl off and bite each other's backs. I tell you what," he said, suddenly inspired, "let's have them in and tell them that they've *got* to fight !"

"I say, Dove," said Parker, yet more icily, feeling that his victim was now in his power, "we all like to hear your views, as those of a new Prefect; but really——!" He broke off; dignified, official, shocked. . . .

The snub went home. Dove realized that his suggestion had itself been somewhat unworthy of a Prefect's position. He remained silent for a few moments; and one of the Prefects, who was usually a little bit afraid of him, thought that it was his duty to support the Head Boy, so remarked, "I've got a Latin Prose to do, Dove, when you've *quite* finished your lecture upon Gore and Gwatkin." He put away his Novel and drew out a blotter, quietly.

Dove was beyond noticing his real occupation.

He turned, without a word, and left the study.

He wished, later, that he had not slammed the door. . . . It would have shown more dignity !

As it was, the Prefects united in a laugh.

"Rotten idea," said one of them.

"Too bally keen," said Parker, and he poked the fire.

III

The strenuous Dove had only been House Prefect for five weeks. In that time, however, he had clearly seen that all his schemes for screwing a little energy into the School House would have to

be carried out in spite of, rather than with the help of, his fellow House Prefects. He therefore left their study discouraged but not in any sense defeated. Gore and Gwatkin should still be made to act a little more according to the best Bilton traditions !

He saw, none the less, as he walked with slow dejection down the study-corridor, that he had not been altogether in the right. His idea of having the two new kids in and forcing them to fight like gentlemen, would possibly have been all right last term, when he was just one of the big fellows, a double First without further official responsibilities : it was an impossible suggestion for the House Prefects as a body to turn into action. He had spoken hurriedly, as the thought rose to his brain, and he had given that lazy smug, Parker, just the chance he had been longing for,—the chance to snub an uncomfortably active new Prefect by making him feel an interfering bungler, who ought to be content to follow the lead of his seniors and betters.

Dove saw all this : but he was merely human, and he saw a little more.

He saw clearly that Parker had, thus early, scored a triumph, which would make the other Prefects, half-converted until now to the idea of sterner action, sink back contentedly on the old restful policy of sitting in the spacious end-study provided for their comfort and letting the House generally go to pot. Dove's ideas, they could now say, were hopeless.

Unless,—and this was where Dove's mere human

vision became clearest,—unless he carried out his idea, however bad, in spite of Parker, and so made the Head Boy realize that things were going to be done and that the most dignified course for him would be to associate himself with them and thus pretend that *he* was doing them. . . .

It was not a very lofty notion, but to a boy feeling rather sore it was extremely tempting. And incidentally it might cure Gore and Gwatkin. . . .

Dove quickened his slow pace and hammered on the door of study number eight.

IV

“ Good egg ! ” exclaimed Tweed. “ I call it an absolutely A.I. notion.” He tilted back his chair, finding good support for his boots on a play-box already with all the outward attributes of a mud-scraper, and he beamed delightedly upon his friend.

Tweed’s pleasure in the scheme was genuine. Dove and he were the only School House fellows in the Cricket and Football School Elevens, and it was natural that they should have become close pals. When Dove had been selected as a Prefect, Tweed had realized that it would make a little difference. It had made more than he could ever have imagined. . . . Old “ Lark,” (as he had always called him,) full of keenness and energy as usual, had felt that as House Prefect he must be as much as possible in the Prefects’ study, trying to get things better in the House. Consequently, not only had he naturally abandoned all the little adventures,

harmless enough, that the two pals used to share so long as there were Prefects' rules to break; but also he had largely deserted number eight for the far less congenial end-study.



Yet here he was; lolling back in the old chair; his hands contentedly pressed in his pockets; explaining one more of the usual mad schemes! The last five weeks seemed a mere boring dream, and in the present enterprise he foresaw endless pleasant councils of war like the one now being held. Small wonder that he beamed.

"We'll have it in the Changing Room," he said. "Rope off one end with dressing-gown cords slung across from hook to hook, you know. The floor's a bit hard, but that won't hurt Gore and Gwatkin. Better men than them have fought in there. I have, myself! . . ."

"After Prep will be the best time," said Dove, utterly ignoring the final remark as quite below his notice. "Poor old Easton's got discouraged lately and never comes round, and it gives us a good hour. The 'contest' should be what is known as 'sporting.'"

"Yes," remarked Tweed a little doubtfully, "but that's supposed to be a sort of quiet time: next thing, almost, to lock-ups. Won't Parker cut up nasty?"

Dove, with a fine air of unconcern, took up a book and opened it. "Does it really matter much," he asked, "*how* Parker cuts up?"

It is regrettable to chronicle that this remark, undoubtedly shocking from the lips of a House Prefect, merely increased Tweed's look of undiluted happiness. He leant yet further back and glanced at Dove's defiant face. He knew nothing of the whys or wherefores, and cared less. He only knew that the old happy times of last term had been born again.

V

The whole House was delighted when it heard the news,—or nearly the whole House. The notable

exceptions were Parker and, curiously enough, the two combatants.

Tweed told them the idea : (he assured Dove that it would come better from some one who was not a Prefect :) and carried out his duty with great relish, next evening in number eight.

“ At last,” he ended, after the manner of a Ciceronian peroration : “ at last this great enmity, which has ruined for too long the fair lives of both of you and plunged the watching House into a turmoil of excitement ; at last it is to be settled, once and for all, by the ancient and honourable, the most ancient and the most honourable,—er,—er,—expedient, yes, of—let us say—public contest.” He paused a moment, having got rather hung up as to his oratory, and collected his ideas. The two enemies had anything but an exultant air, as they stood gaping open-mouthed at him. Dove found it hard to keep a serious face. “ No more,” went on Tweed, rolling his words, after the Head Master’s speech day manner, “ no more will notes be written ; no more will needed books be hidden ; no more will an already overworked House Master be worried with—er—sneaking ; ” (this, he felt, was a sad drop, but no better word would come ;) “ no more will your warfare be waged in such a petty and ignoble mould,” (“ mould ” was much more the real thing,) “ but after manly and fair combat the victor will bend over the prostrate body of his former foe, weltering in blood and every manner of abomination, and grasping his unconscious hand will say, ‘ Comrade, I forgive you. Hereafter we are friends for ever.’ ”

Tweed's voice at this point broke with obvious emotion, and he could not proceed. Dove, too, was making queer sounds behind a handkerchief.

Gore and Gwatkin, however, were by no means in love with this touching and dramatic picture of themselves. Neither was at all keen to "welter in blood and every manner of abomination," as Tweed so picturesquely put it. Prostrate unconsciousness did not appeal to them. Their "great enmity" had, in fact, been more of a hobby than a passion: an exercise in "scoring." Now, as they took occasion of the seniors' emotion to glance sideways at each other, lo, love filled their souls. They did not want to fight.

"We're friends *now*," said Gwatkin timidly.

"*I* don't want to hurt Gwatkin," put in Gore.

"Well, possibly you won't," Tweed answered reassuringly. "He'll probably hurt *you*. . . . Anyhow, the whole House is sick of your rotten sort of small-girl, cry-baby squabble, and you've jolly well got to settle it finally, whatever it is, in the only manly way invented: see? Saturday, 9 p.m., the Changing Room. Principals,—that's you,—to be there fifteen minutes earlier. Right-turn! Love to Mother. Close the door as you go out."

Parker was naturally in a position to express his disapproval in a less half-hearted manner: but he got no more satisfaction.

"What's the trouble?" Dove asked, with a carefully rehearsed air of surprise and innocence. "There's no rule against fighting, is there? I know it's gone out a bit lately, but it's a good old

custom and far the best way of ending up a row. Gore and Gwatkin *ought* to fight. It isn't healthy for them to go on nagging at each other any longer! Why should you object?"

"It's uncommonly like bullying," said Parker, "if they don't want to do it." He was not by any means a fool.

Somehow or other, this point of view had never yet occurred to Dove. (It had not worried Tweed.) Now he saw its justice, and felt a momentary shame, but he could not let Parker triumph. In the next instant he began to justify himself.

"What do you mean, exactly?" he enquired. "The actual fight can't possibly be bullying,—besides we're going to give them gloves,—and if you mean forcing them into it, why, you might just as well say it was bullying to have compulsory Footer for kids who don't like it." This convinced even himself, and he went on more confidently: "That's done because it's good for them, and so is this. Anyhow," (at this point he played his trump card,) "it's going to happen. *You* didn't seem to like the notion, so I got Tweed to run it. If you don't approve, you can easily come in and raid it. I'll be there!"

This last inducement for the raid rather tied the Head Boy's hands, as he was anxious not to have a definite break with Dove, whose athletic performances gave him a lot of power in the House. He therefore retired to the end-study, sat well up against the fire, and told his fellow-Prefects that he thought they ought not to attend. Dove would

then feel in the cold. Their immediate acceptance of this semi-official order almost restored his lost sense of dignity. . . .

The whole rank and file of the House, however, was bursting with anxiety to see this historic contest. Timidly, all such as dared approach the great man Tweed began to ask him if they might come in and watch.

"I don't know yet," he answered. "We'll see." He was not quite sure how to choose the audience.

It was only at tea-time on the day before the fight that he was suddenly taken with an inspiration, which he passed on to Dove afterwards in their headquarters, number eight. The result was seen in the document opposite, which was taken round all studies (except the Prefects') with great secrecy by an appointed fag during that evening's lock-ups. It reflects credit on his scoutcraft that he completed his round without being detected,—in which event Tweed had given him strict official orders to swallow the document and then report for punishment at number eight.

When once it became known that the notice was seriously meant, so far anyhow as admission charges went, money began rolling in. Term was young; nobody keen to stand; and it was felt that all money was paid as an investment in the term-end feast. There are sixty-five boys in the School House, and by 5 p.m. on Saturday Tweed was in possession of two pounds and eighteen shillings as his total takings.

It was a big sum, undoubtedly; in fact, Tweed

NOTICE !

In consequence of the ENORMOUS DEMAND for
admittance to the sensational and historic

GLOVE PRIZE-FIGHT (under Bilton Rules)

between

“ KID ” GWATKIN and “ DARKIE ” GORE
(7 st. 5 lb.) (7 st. 6½ lb.)

It has been decided to charge the following

ADMISSION :

CHAIRS (to be brought by owner) 1s. nett.

STANDING ROOM (if) 6d. „

Payment to be made before 5 P.M. on the day to
the Manager in Study No. Eight.

The Proceeds, without any deduction for ex-
penses, will be devoted towards the usual end-of-
term spread, and a big house is therefore expected
in everybody's interest.

CHANGING ROOM : 9 P.M. Sharp : To-morrow.

NO SMOKING ALLOWED

NO APPLAUSE TILL HALL IS CLEARED AND
CHAIRS REPLACED IN STUDIES

FLOREAT BILTONIA !

GOD SAVE THE KING !!

No Money Refunded.

began to think it was *too* big. This idea came over him at 8.45 p.m., when the principals for the great contest duly reported to him in the Changing Room. Full of enthusiasm, energy and excitement, he was showing them a few tips in the noble art, with a view to "increasing" (as he told them) "the attractiveness of their display without abating the blood-thirstiness of their vendetta," when he came to realize that about forty shilling pieces and a few score of coppers, pressed into two-trouser-pockets, can be pretty accurately described as a weight-handicap to any one about to referee in a sensational and historic glove contest.

"Here, Gwatkin," he said, emptying the whole takings into somebody's right stocking, "put this somewhere—somewhere *safe*—until the show is over, and buck up about it. The time's getting on."

" 'Somewhere,' Tweed? " asked Gwatkin, gaping owl-like by the door. "But where? "

The manager by now was busy with "Darkie" Gore's costume, and he did not show patience in his answer. "Where? " he mimicked, in a high-squeaking voice. "Where do you think? In the middle of the passage? Or in the Head's study? Put it *anywhere*, you little ass—anywhere safe—and hurry back and get into your fighting kit."

Gwatkin, already nervous, hurried out timidly into the corridor, stocking in hand, with all the adventurous feelings of a small girl going out to hide a thimble at a children's party. He turned to the right—he turned to the left—he hesitated in the middle. Then with quite a decisive air he set off

towards the studies. He had been taken with a brilliant idea. He would lock the money in his play-box till the fight was over.

With a light step he strode forward—and nearly stepped, at the corner, into the arms of his House Master! Luckily he was able to halt, well in the shadow, just in time. He stood behind the shelter of a merciful boot-cupboard, his heart beating, while Dr. Easton passed within a yard of him.

This was an adventure, thought the daring Gwatkin.

But what now? Old Easton had been obviously bent on one of his rare visits to the studies. All idea of going along there with the stocking was quite impossible—Tweed was horribly impatient and in an angry mood—yet what safe hiding-place was there between this corner and the Changing Room?

Then Gwatkin had his second even more brilliant idea. Tweed had said “anywhere safe.” What could be safer than the box on the passage wall devoted to the Polynesian Orphans? Dusty and with rusted padlock, it simply asked for patronage. Old Easton, every one knew, never opened it. He tilted the whole proceeds of the fight into box number 6.

* * * * *

Gwatkin thought he had been clever, but he was frankly surprised to find that Tweed shared that opinion. Dove had arrived by now, with warning of the Doctor's unexpected visit, and he joined in the praise till Gwatkin almost had his head turned.

" I advise you to leave the oof where it is now," Dove ended, addressing his remarks to Tweed. " Box number 6 is about as safe as the Bank of England. The Head hasn't opened it for years, whereas you never know when he'll have one of his rotten ' play-box inspections ' and ask what all these coppers are—you know his kindergarten fads ! Besides, if you force the lock now, there's sure to be a fuss about it. We'll tell the fellows not to mess the thing up with the usual banana-skins, etcetera ; then, at the end of term, a little dirty work with an old knife, and—— ! *Savvy ?* "

" *Compris*," answered Tweed, in the expressive language of the trenches, and winked extensively.

VI

Many great fights, at School or Sporting Club, have been described in full by clever writers : but it would need a skill more than human to give any adequate account of the Gore-Gwatkin glove-fight.

First would have to come a scene not witnessed by Manager or Public, a scene in which only the contestants played a part.

" I don't see it," remarked Gwatkin, in the privacy of his study at about 8.40 p.m. on Saturday.

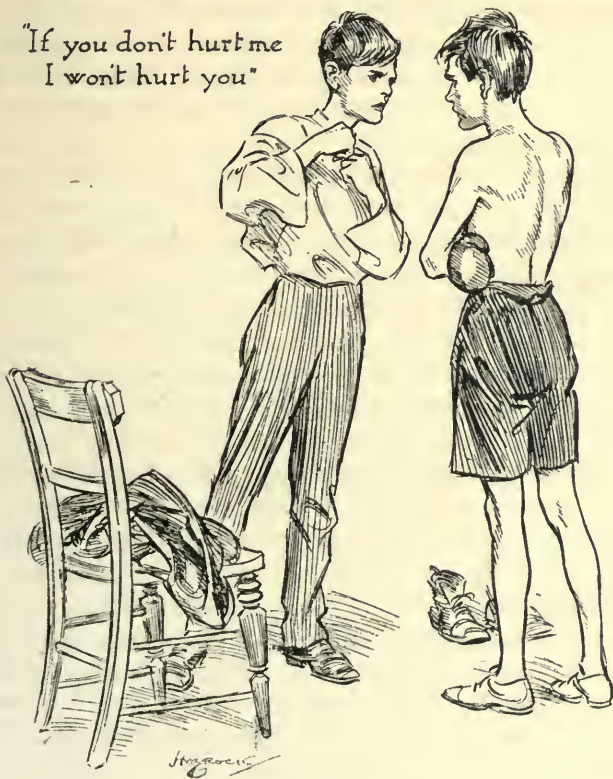
" Don't see what ? " asked Gore. They had been together all day, but conversation had been rather scarce.

" Why, here's everyone paying up to see us fight and Tweed made me put pounds and *pounds* into that end box just before Prep and everybody'll

have a blow-out at the end of term and we don't want to hurt each other."

It was an involved sentence, but Gore at once

"If you don't hurt me
I won't hurt you"



grasped its point. "If you don't hurt me, I won't hurt you," he said bluntly. Gwatkin was relieved to have the thing so neatly put.

The excited public, however, as it surged into the Changing Room twenty minutes later, had no

idea of this disgraceful compact. It merely beheld the principals, looking very much like business, stripped to the waist, with footer-shorts and canvas shoes as their sole articles of wear. They sat upon chairs in their corners and glared at one another with a quite convincing fierceness. Behind each stood a second, in more ample flannels, fitted out with towel and bottle.

The audience seated itself amid some confusion, as each member brought his own chair and all wanted the front places. It was clear from their comments that they were, like the announcement circulated, only half-serious about the fixture.

Gore and Gwatkin, however, had an air of almost too much earnestness. Their handshake was an insult, and never have two boxers faced each other with such savage grimness written on their brows. True, they did not deliver a large quantity of blows, and these were not too violent: but they made up for this by frowning. If looks could kill, (as the expression runs,) the first round would have seen a double knock-out in the opening moments.

Looks not being fatal, neither party even showed pink on his soft white body. They took it in turns to tap gently.

The audience, amused and mocking at the start, began before the round's end to find the show a little tedious.

"I say," shouted someone, "it's a boxing-match, not a competition in face-making."

"Order, order!" Tweed cried fiercely, but it was clear that the remark had met with favour.

Tweed at once decided, as Manager and Referee, that something must be done. He waited till the pair, amid mock applause, (which he hushed instantly,) had almost staggered back into their corners, where the agile seconds blew and spat water on them in a thoroughly professional attempt to fit them for another no less strenuous bout. Then he went gently up behind Gore, who seemed upon the whole to be the bigger slacker, and whispered in his ear.

"Look here," he said. "Fellows have come here to see a *fight* and there is going to be one too; see? You'd better jolly well buck up or you will know about it afterwards."

These few simple words had a quite startling effect on their recipient. Gore seemed suddenly another fellow. He rose like one electrified. He rushed in upon the altogether unsuspecting Gwatkin.

Gore was not a fool. He knew Tweed to be stronger than Gwatkin, canes harder than a padded glove. . . .

It was this train of logic that led to Gwatkin's receiving a very painful jab upon the nose, shortly followed by another in the same extremely tender spot. While he was feeling, with interest, to see whether the organ was still there and if so how much blood it was producing, his erstwhile accomplice landed him an undercut, or anyhow a juicy thing of some sort, on the ear. He put his hand to that, and got another on the nose.

This treachery was more than he could bear.

He knew nothing, remember, of its reason, and

he was not always quite master of his temper. He was an only son, and had come straight from home. (Gore had been to a bad private school.) He was not used to anything like this. If he had complained to the Head Master about being "teased," here was a far greater outrage ! He was too angry for tears. There was then only one alternative, and he adopted it. He lost his temper.

"It's not fair," he cried, half bellow and half squeak, to the astounded Public. "He keeps hitting me hard on the nose. The gloves aren't equal. I can't reach him. I'll *murder* him. I'll fight him *without* gloves." Whereupon he managed to wriggle out of one of them and hurled it on the ground, after the manner of a mediæval knight.

There followed what reporters call "Sensation."

Even the threats of Tweed and the authority of Dove, (who began to realize his own position if the House Master should appear,) were unable to repress the tumult of applause that greeted this heroic challenge. Here was the promise of something infinitely more amusing.

Imagine then a very different situation at the start of the third round in this historic contest. Gwatkin could scarcely be restrained. At the words, "Seconds out of the ring," he nearly disqualified himself by dashing upon Gore. Dragged back into his corner, he stood there, panting with rage, and holding his right arm bent back as if to preserve the avenging strength in its clenched fingers. Quick on the word, he flung himself across the floor, blind with wild fury and resolved to plaster Gore with



'He flung himself
across the floor'

the red juice from which his forebears doubtless had derived their name.

Perhaps success would have smiled on him more if, in his rage, he had not shut his eyes to strike.

Gore, emboldened by the quite surprising skill with which he had delivered those four earlier blows, stood near his corner, watchful and reliant, like the young Roman Gladiator in a Christmas Number presentation plate. Gwatkin, at last giving way to tears, struck out savagely as he reached the centre of the ring, where he expected his opponent in very decency to be, and nearly fell as he struck air. And Gore, marshalling a swift counter-attack, launched it on him as he tottered forward. That last one, where he hit upwards, had seemed good! He did the same again. It got the savage Gwatkin on the chin. . . .

It got him on what pugilistic experts call "the point," it performed what they describe succinctly as "K.O." Gwatkin staggered back,—crumpled,—flung his arms up,—and fell in a graceful spread-eagle pattern on the unsympathetic boards.

As Tweed impressively counted Gwatkin out, there was a scene of really genuine enthusiasm. Nobody said a word about "money refunded."

Even Gore thought the show had been a real success. And Gwatkin said nothing for some time. . . .

VII

. . . "What excuse have you to offer, Gwatkin?" concluded Dr. Easton sternly

“ Please, sir ; Gore——”

“ Silence, sir,” roared Dr. Easton, who, like most indifferent masters, could be very stern indeed with little boys. “ I have already told you on more than one occasion that I do not wish Gore brought into these matters. I am asking you your reason for absenting yourself,—not coming in late, mind you, though that is a serious offence, but absenting yourself altogether from evening Prayers.”

“ Well, sir ; Tweed——”

The House Master rose majestically from his chair. “ It is quite clear to me, Gwatkin, that you are for some reason or other trying deliberately to annoy, to ‘ cheek,’ me. You have only been in my House for a few weeks, but during that time you have appeared before me more often than many boys in their whole school career : sometimes sent up by masters for carelessness or loss of books, but generally of your own free will with some preposterous and trivial complaint against another boy. You may call this amusing. *I* do not, and it is also too much like sneaking to fall in with my ideas. In the present case, I am not interested in anything to do with Gore or Tweed. I enquired your reasons for a serious breach of the House rules. You prefer to try and put me off with your usual pettifogging complaints against others. *This* time, Gwatkin, you shall take the consequences. That will be a useful lesson. . . . And I more than suspect, from the red marks on your under lip and the general condition of your features, that this spirit of complaint against others has led you into

trouble. We here do not forbid fighting, nor do we—on principle—make enquiries on the matter, but we know how to deal with it when detected.”

He uttered this last amazing sentence as though



*Gwatkin had never been thrashed,
but he knew the symptoms*

it really meant something, and moved dramatically towards a rose-wood bookcase, from behind which he took a thin cane. Gwatkin had never been thrashed, but he knew the symptoms. The Head Master flicked the cane.

“You have got to learn, Gwatkin,” he said, abruptly and wisely abandoning the subject of

fight, " firstly to obey House rules and secondly, if you fail in that, to take the blame without incriminating others. Put yourself across that chair-back, sir."

* * * * *

Gwatkin rose stiffly, sore in more senses than one.

This was the last outrage of all. He had been made to fight; Gore had betrayed him; he had been thrown violently backward on to a hard floor amid universal cheers; and now he had been beaten, six hard strokes all on the same spot . . . for nothing!

He hated Dr. Easton, he hated Gore, he hated Tweed, he hated the whole House. He'd like to murder the whole lot of them!

Then he had a less lofty, but more subtle, notion of revenge.

" You may go," the Head had said: but at the door he halted, fingers on the handle.

" May I speak about something else, sir? " he asked gently.

Dr. Easton was suspicious. " Yes, Gwatkin: but I warn you, no further information against any one. I shall treat that as deliberate impertinence."

" Yes, sir," answered Gwatkin, as though butter would freeze in his mouth. " It's not that, sir. It's only that this evening, when I tried to put a penny into box number 6, along the passage,—for the Polynesian Orphans, sir,—I couldn't get it in. I think it must be full. They say it has not been opened for some time, sir."

" Ah, thank you, Gwatkin. That's a useful tip! Good-night."

“ Good-night, sir.”

Dr. Easton smiled almost sentimentally. He was not only pleased about the Polynesians, although his wife’s interests were naturally his : he had also been delighted with the little episode, so far as it affected Gwatkin. It was pleasant to find a boy bearing no malice after punishment. Gwatkin had not only been able to switch off on to another topic in the friendliest, simplest manner, but it had been a topic of extreme importance and he had said “ Good-night, sir,” with an absolute air of elation.

Yes, he had taken rather a gloomy view of Gwatkin till to-night : but now he had high hopes of the lad.

VIII

Dr. Easton made another speech, next evening after Prayers : but this time it was addressed to the whole House.

“ . . . I can only repeat,” this effort concluded, “ that I am gratified and—boys—*touched*. I am aware, I could not fail to be aware, that the objects to which the contents of other boxes are devoted appeal more closely to the School at large and this House in particular : and I believe, I hope, that it was the knowledge of *my* interest, my wife’s interest, in the poor Polynesian Orphans that dictated your sudden generosity. For it *was* generous. . . . Not only did the amount, close upon three pounds, delight me when I resolved to-day to open box number 6 ; but also the fact that no less than forty-

seven shilling pieces were included points almost to an organized collection. Boys, I am deeply touched. Believe me, you will have your reward. There will be many glad, smiling faces soon in Polynesia."

Certainly there were not many in the Dining Hall to-night. A more sad, woe-begone collection of well-doers can scarcely have assembled in the world before. They shifted restlessly upon the forms and glowered back at their smiling and genial Head Master.

Only across the still swollen face of Gwatkin did there flicker for one moment a scarcely noticeable and not noticed gleam of triumph.

The Knock-out does not always end a fight.





THE SPIDER AND THE FLY



OW'S that? "

In the blazing stillness of a day so hot that the air shimmered hazily above the pitch, this cry seemed like the shouting of a strong-lunged regiment. The whole visiting Eleven had, in fact, appealed; for no less sharp and clear, a moment previously, had come the click of ball on bat. Even those of the School who were keener on cherries than on cricket turned lazily over; took a glance, with one finger left to keep the place in book or magazine; and sleepily murmured "Porter out." The wicket-keeper triumphantly threw up the ball. Porter himself began the long trail home. The umpire, annoyed at his decision being taken in this way for granted, had

an only human longing to astonish all of them by a "Not out!" But facts utterly forbade.

"Out!"

Porter, an unapplauded white speck moving slowly on a sea of green, felt thoroughly disgusted. Caught at the wicket, first ball of the Townees' match! He was not grieving only for his average; he certainly felt no anxiety for the School fixture-card. The Town match was so much a certainty that for all except those playing (who welcomed the fixture as very healthy for their average) it had become a bore: a tame affair that closed down other games.

No, that was just what worried him as he went into the pavilion, amid rather insincere cries of "Rough luck!" from others of the School Eleven. Here he was, out with not a knock—with not even a grievance—out first ball, after a rotten stroke played to a rotten ball; and now till seven o'clock he had to sit about and watch the others piling up a score. The Town, he knew from past experience, would get no look-in till to-morrow. Sherborough boots and shoes are famous all the world over, but somehow their manufacture does not seem to make for the production of good bowlers.

Porter, for the first time, ranged himself with the heretics who say that cricket, as a game, is over-slow, with too much sitting round and watching others in it. As he viciously flung down his pads, the crowning grievance rose up in his mind. The school shop opens only for a brief half-hour at the beginning of school matches; and as he drew near,

he had seen its door finally slam shut, barring him from cherries or a lemon-squash until to-morrow.

Yes, Porter was thoroughly disgusted with the universe at large. He felt a thirst already.

"Teasing with the Dook to-day, Beer?" asked Twiss, strolling in with the idea of consolation. I hope no reader will be disappointed when I say that this impressive bit of conversation has no reference to our aristocracy, but concerns the Head Master of Sherborough, Dr. Cumberland.

"Do I *ever* tea with the Dook?" was the angry reply that Twiss was startled to receive.

"Well, I only asked because Darton and I are, and I thought it'd be rather sport all to arrive together. But I don't expect he really loves you very much. You're not kind enough to him in Form!"

"I always thought it was the *Duchess* who sent out the invites?" Porter answered icily.

Twiss saw the mood that he was in and strolled away. "Old Beer's eating worms," was his exact description of it to Darton, whom he met outside. They linked arms and strolled off across the field.

This naturally made Porter feel even worse.

Why *didn't* Mrs. Cumberland ever ask him in to tea? He was about the only fellow in the Eleven who hadn't been invited, and (what made it worse) he was the only member of the Eleven who was also in the Sixth. Of course, as Twiss said, he *had* rather scored off the old Dook there; but what had that to do with Mrs. C.? Until now he had been only too glad to escape; but to-day, with six



"Do I ever
tea with the Dook?"

hours to fill up and the school shop shut, tea and strawberries would not be half a bad idea, especially with Twiss and Darton there as well to help in ragging the old Dook.

He looked out moodily across the field, to where these two had settled down on a grass bank, and was just about to turn his own bad temper into yet another grievance, when this rare mood passed and the look of rather wicked cheeriness, familiar to his pals, came back across his face like sunshine after cloud.

“By gad, I *will*!” he said almost aloud. “They’ll simply have a fit!”

He looked across at them once again, but with quite a different expression. Then he gave a happy little laugh, well known by all his friends as boding ill to somebody, and with a light step went, whistling cheerily, into his study.

II

There is a great risk that yet other readers may be disappointed, after a momentary joy, when it is related that Porter, entering his study, went straight to another’s boy desk and began to rummage in it recklessly; moreover, that this other boy was Twiss.

Any one who knows anything about school stories, particularly those published at a penny, will be fairly sure that Porter is going to vent his anger and jealousy on Twiss by stealing that poor boy’s prize exercise (whatever that may be), or—

who knows?—putting into his desk something purloined from elsewhere.



The truth, however, is—as usual—hardly less amazing.

Porter stirred up a hot-bed of old letters, fixture-

cards, notices, etcetera, that seemed to suggest their owner must be obeying the advertisement and trying to "save waste paper." Twiss was of those amiable lunatics who collect mementoes. Any notice of a game in which he played, any photograph in which he appeared, any invitation he received, went straight into his hotch-potch, the eventual object of which was a mystery and amusement to the House at large.

Porter made the collection revolve under his scornful finger until a certain specimen appeared on top; then he took it out and sat at his own desk. Thereafter for some minutes he was quite unusually studious with pen and paper. Several times, in fact, he appeared almost to have done his task; then, dissatisfied, he would tear it into fragments.

The copy, with which he was so diligent, ran thus :

" School House,
" Sherborough.
" *Tuesday.*

" DEAR TWISS,

" It will give the Head Master and myself so much pleasure if you will come to tea to-morrow, Wednesday, during the tea-interval. No doubt one or two of the opposing eleven will be here, so I hope you can come and help to entertain them !

" Yours sincerely,

" ETHEL CUMBERLAND."

He felt the more confidence because he had seen a large number of these invitations, and all had been almost exactly the same in wording, even to that puzzling mark of exclamation.

Only one word did Porter change—and that word was the name.

“Dear Porter,” ran the present note. He did not expect that he would ever be called on to produce it, but if the recent war has taught one lesson to soldiers and civilians alike, it is the absolute necessity of having one’s documents in order.

III

Perhaps some great philosopher will some day turn his mind upon the Public Schools and decide why it is that Head Masters—except in the rare cases where they are feared as brutes—usually seem to be looked upon as butts.

It is not only in fiction that the Head Master is regarded as the easiest game for any one who wishes to be funny. Imitation of his voice and mannerisms is the very least of the indignities he has to suffer. A regular epic of utterly false legends, largely affecting his moral character, grows up around him, as each boy to hear or invent a new story immediately fits it to the Head as hero. Old Boys come down and hear the new varieties with relish, rewarding them by a revival of the old. Any one who wishes to raise a cheap laugh can do so most easily by a yarn, however poor, concerning the Head Master. Nobody believes it, but it becomes a matter almost of patriotic decency to be amused.

And so it was at Sherborough.

Dr. Cumberland certainly was popular. No less

surely did he have nothing in common with the fictional idea of a Head Master. He was not fat; hair still grew upon his head in the appointed place; he did not use long Latin words in ordinary conversation. He was, in fact, rather of the modern type of Head Master—young, keen, active, inclined if anything to be slangy in his speech, and constantly seen on the river in a skiff during the Summer Term. Tall, well-proportioned, clean-shaven, with dark, deep-set eyes; even the School caricaturists found it annoyingly hard to draw an ugly thing that was entirely like him.

Yet—is there not always something for the humorist to seize? And is not Cumberland a ducal name? Thus, though the Head was really of most simple tastes, he was always represented—once given title as “The Dook”—to be utterly beyond and above the habits of those “common folk” around him; and any anecdote that showed him as luxurious or condescending enough was certain of a favourable reception. Along these lines, roughly, was conducted that polite, almost affectionate, ragging of the Head which is a general condition of most Public Schools.

But in this as in sport or all else, though many try, there is in most schools one fellow admittedly pre-eminent in his department.

This expert, then, at Sherborough was Porter.

Porter, after being the terror of most Form Masters during a long school career, arrived in the Lower Sixth less by merit of scholarship than by a constant, gradual pushing-up process due to his

staying on when others left. Also (it was rumoured, anyhow) most of the Form Masters were glad when they saw him moving upward, onward. Until Porter reached the Sixth, Dr. Cumberland had been a happy man. Having himself a full supply of quiet humour, the Head was well aware of the great joke against him. He did not complain of the smiles and winks served round the Sixth when, in their Herodotus, they came across the record of some Eastern potentate's astounding grandeur and overbearing haughtiness of manner. He envied these boys their simple delight. If one of them outstepped the bounds and tried to be objectionably funny—and by this he meant, of course, if one of them attempted to raise a laugh against himself—well, he knew how to deal with it.

But here was the difference. Porter *did* try to raise laughs; actually raised them, often; and the Head did *not* know how to deal with him! Dr. Cumberland had an unconfessed longing to catch Porter out.

Porter was not really clever enough to be in the Sixth at all, and always he played on this fact. If he made the whole Form rock with laughter by a mistranslation, involving (as a rule) some reference to ducal grandeur, his regrets, his humility of ignorance, were so sincere that the Head, if he had punished him, would have been a brute, who took an unlucky error to be an intended insult.

A week before the Town match, it is true, he had rather overdone things by translating *Nil desperandum*, *Teucro duce*, as "Do not despair,

Duke Teucro," and though his protests of ignorance had spared him from the deserved punishment for cheek, he had for the first time gained a heavy imposition for "slovenly translation."

Porter, admitting—with the frankness of all great men—that he had failed in subtlety for once, had not had a long wait for his revenge.

First lesson on Monday, under Dr. Cumberland, was given up to paraphrase. Portions of unoffending poems were selected and the Sixth Form had to express their meaning, but in different words. These were read out, a verse by each boy, as called on by the Head.

This was Porter's moment of the week. It will be seen at once what a grand chance it gave for the display of overdone stupidity. The Form often had to laugh aloud, try as they would not to, on hearing his elaborate attempts to "raise" the Head. Tennyson's "In Memoriam" was being paraphrased this term, and even the sad beauty of its verse did not shame him to silence. For the simple line, "Or eagle's wing or insect's eye," he once had brought out this: "Aut the propelling apparatus of our largest bird aut the centrally situated, sight-ensuring organ of an animalcula," and when Dr. Cumberland thought that he had got him at last cornered, escaped his doom by pleading, with tears in his humble voice: "Please, sir, I couldn't *think* of any other single words for 'or,' 'wing,' and 'eye.' I've never done this sort of work before."

Three days before the Town match the Sixth Form had reached that restful canto where Tennyson

describes the peace of a country lawn, when the house party, tempted by summer moonlight, lingers underneath the trees, listening to the murmur of a stream and seeing common objects transformed to beauty by the shimmering light :

The brook alone far off was heard,
And on the board the fluttering urn.

Confronted with a problem, the Head would often flatter the Head Boy and any other favourites by asking, "What did *you* think it meant, So-and-so?" On this occasion he questioned three as to the last line, and all agreed with the first boy's version: "And on a table the urn, rattling on the wood as it boils, preparing coffee for the party."

"What?" queried Dr. Cumberland. "Can the whole Sixth Form of Sherborough School rise to no more poetic notion than that the house party was going to have coffee?"

Silence.

"'And on the board the fluttering urn,'" repeated the Head in the fond tones of a poetry lover speaking a good line. "Come! Surely some boy, even now, can think of some rather finer explanation?"

Suddenly a hand raised. Porter's.

The sensation was enormous. Nobody had ever suspected "Beer" Porter of taking any interest in the paraphrase except as an exercise in journalese—or humour!

Dr. Cumberland was pleased. Perhaps, after all, he had misjudged this boy? But *Teucro duce*!

“ I’m really glad, Porter,” he said, falling head-long into the pit dug for him, “ that it should be you, of all boys, who holds up your hand. I think this is almost the only occasion this term when the whole Form has agreed as to a disputed line. Your versions have, I’m afraid, sometimes been so different from the rest as to upset us all, but they have *not* shown thought ! ” (Here the Head was rewarded with a laugh and beamed delightedly.) “ Well, I won’t rub that in, Porter, but I *am* glad it’s you who have been able to soar above the rather tame idea that they were going to take coffee ! Tell them, now, what *you* thought.”

“ Please, sir,” said Porter, with round, simple eyes, “ *I* thought it was TEA. . . .”

And now, swollen with this recent triumph and the roar of laughter it drew forth, Porter, who never failed anywhere for lack of courage, was carrying the war—so to speak—into the country of an enemy who thirsted to destroy him.

Anxious to convulse Twiss and Darton by his unexpected arrival in the Dook’s drawing-room although they knew he was not asked, he kept carefully out of their way towards tea-time, and when the interval arrived, retired to his study long enough to give them time to get to the School House.

Then he started forth.

He felt no nervousness at all. That was not his way ; and, anyhow, he felt there was really no risk. The fun of seeing Twiss’s face—and tea ; those were the only points in the whole scheme. The

Dook, of course, had no idea who had been asked or who had not; and even if Mrs. Dook spotted among the crowd of Townsmen that he had not, she would naturally, being a woman, think he had made a mistake or something and be too polite to say a word about it. Besides, it was a ghastly thought—but she might take him for a Townee. . . .

Without a tremor, then, he pulled the door-bell of the private house, and asked the stately butler for Mrs. Cumberland.

It was with a smile that he walked into the spider's web.

IV

Captain Porter, D.S.O., in telling this story always says—about here—that he had rough luck. As he is, and always was, a thoroughly good sportsman, probably he thinks this true or he would never plead it; for luck is certainly a name that most men give to the cleverness of rivals.

Read and judge.

The first piece of alleged bad luck, one may imagine, consisted in Porter's discovery that he was, after all, the first arrival.

He had always imagined himself coming, almost unobserved (except by Twiss and Darton), into a room crowded with other men in the Eleven, Townees, parents, and the like. Yet here he found himself alone in a palatial apartment; certainly encouraged by a large array of cups and the inevitable strawberries, but rather beginning to

wonder what he should say to Mrs. Cumberland when she arrived.

Probably that would be the second bit of so-called bad luck—or even the second and the third together!

For it was not Mrs. Cumberland who presently arrived to cheer his loneliness.

It was the Dook!

V

“Hullo, Porter!” said Dr. Cumberland, with an agreeable smile. “This is a pleasant surprise.”

“Yes, sir,” was—it must be regretfully admitted—the best retort that “Beer” Porter, famed for his resource and dash, could manage. He was thinking. How much did the Dook suspect? Where was Mrs. C.? Why didn’t Twiss and the other idiots turn up? Could the whole thing be an elaborate trap, arranged to suit the Dook’s admittedly strange sense of humour?

The Head, however, appeared utterly without suspicion; friendliness its very self.

“Well,” he said, “it’s lucky that my visitor should be a Sixth Form boy: we have so much more in common! *Tennyson*, for instance, Porter,” and he laughed, clearly without malice.

“Yes, sir,” Porter found himself replying tamely once again. Somehow or other he had not felt so young, so altogether in a master’s power, for years.

The Dook tried to do his best to keep the social talk going. “I wonder if it has struck you,” he went on, “how very appropriate it is that you

should come here for *tea*! Now if it had been coffee——” Porter was just beginning to feel sure that the Dook knew and was playing with him, brutally, when the other rose from his seat, gave

“Hullo, Porter! This is
a pleasant surprise”



an obviously genial laugh, and patting him upon the shoulder, said in a very friendly way, “Ah, Porter, I fear you are a humorist! Well, never mind; you might be worse things—far; but just you take care I don’t really catch you out pulling my leg one of these fine days.”

So it was only the Dook's way of getting back about the paraphrase! "Beer," thoroughly relieved, gave a nervous laugh, and the Head Master, puzzled by the sudden shyness of this boy whom he had always thought covered with a hide like a rhinoceros, turned tactfully to less awkward subjects and asked about the score.

"Beer" Porter, reassured, was gaining courage every minute, when a curious thing happened.

The door-handle turned; but instead of his hostess or more guests, as he had hoped, there entered a footman bearing a teapot and a single cup and saucer on a small silver tray. These, after removing a dish of the strawberries to make room, he placed in front of the Head Master.

"My wife," said the Dook calmly, pouring out his tea, "will be very sorry for this stupid mistake."

Porter suddenly was all at sea again. He could not even raise a "Yes, sir." He was thinking. Mistake? . . .

"What time did she ask you?" he heard the Head enquire. Whether it was the ambiguity of the question or the frontal nature of the attack—something upset Porter and led him to an error in strategy which can hardly be blamed against bad luck.

He drew out his invitation and handed it to the Head Master.

Clearly, "documents" should be kept in one's pocket till they are demanded.

The Dook's face, however, showed no signs of any emotion whatsoever as he read the letter.

"My wife is a very busy woman," was all that he remarked as he handed it back. Porter was left to wonder whether this was a reference to her handwriting in the note, or what; and for some seconds the Head did not help him. Then he spoke again.

"It was nearly four o'clock when the Cottage Hospital Board, which she had said she could not attend to-day, telephoned up to ask urgently for her attendance as they had not a quorum. She at once sent a message round to all her invited guests, saying how sorry she was she could not be here for the tea interval, but asking them to come in any time after five-thirty for some late tea and fruit, if they happened not to be in the field or batting." Was there a slight emphasis upon that word "invited"?

Through a sick whirr of buzzing noises poor "Beer" heard the Head shoot at him, "I'm afraid *you* didn't get that message?"

"N-no, sir," he found himself stammering. He wished that he had not embarked on this safe-seeming exploit. It was to have been a social lark; it seemed strangely like a cross-examination, to which he hardly knew the healthiest answers.

Once again, however, the Dook (whom, of course, he knew to be a blind old ass) surprised him by not following the question further.

"Too bad! Poor Porter!" he said, with a smile in his eyes. "But she will be back in ten minutes now," and he turned to the subject of books, asking his guest what authors, living and dead, he preferred.

Porter had begun to feel that the crisis was passing and the strawberries approaching, (the Dook, oddly, offered him no tea,) when his host suddenly picked up a big volume from the sofa on which he was sitting.

“Now, as an example,” he began, “of what I’ve been saying about the wisdom of having no superior ideas, but reading *everything* and so broadening your views, here’s a book I’m in the middle of; a book you’d hardly expect a schoolmaster to care about; a book called *Crime and the Criminal Class*. But do you know, Porter, I’ve learnt something from it, and something—though you wouldn’t expect it—useful to me here at Sherborough. It says that the greatest criminals, and even more the bunglers, invariably plan everything with almost superhuman ingenuity and cunning, but no less invariably *they always overlook one detail* fatal to themselves. It may actually be nothing bigger, Porter, than the way they form—well, a capital P!”

Hereon he looked up at Porter, who says that when he saw “the vicious glint in that wicked old man’s eye,” (for such was his description, to me, of his virtuous and less than middle-aged Head Master,) he knew that half the time he had been merely played with and understood his curious discomfort.

The Dook slowly turned over a few pages.

“And here,” he went on, with certainly a curious twinkle in his eyes, “there is a chapter upon *Forgers*, and they say——”

At this providential moment the door opened and Mrs. Cumberland came in.

Nobody throughout the school has anything but praise for her. Pretty, smart, tactful, totally without swagger, and a true sportswoman, she gains good reports from all, and thus Porter was



not surprised that, whatever she might think, she said not a word that possibly could get him into trouble. She merely apologized for being late and so aroused in him a respect and admiration that never lessened.

“Well,” she ended, “I’m glad my husband was here to do host—though he doesn’t seem to have given you much hospitality!” She looked reproachfully at the untouched strawberries and cakes.

“My dear,” smiled the Head Master, “Porter is one of my Sixth Form boys, and does not need any refreshment so vulgar and fleshly as mere *tea*—or *coffee*.” (Porter no doubt exaggerates when he vows that the Dook winked at him here.) “We have had, as a matter of fact, a very interesting conversation.”

“What about?” said his wife, sitting down and pushing an electric bell beside her. “Something deadly dull, I’m sure, and not half so refreshing as strawberries or tea.”

And now Porter felt a ghastly flush grow across his face and an uneasy fever about all his limbs, for he liked this Mrs. Cumberland; and if the Dook should answer “Forgery” and bring out, *in front of her*, the whole episode, which suddenly appeared to him a rather rude and inglorious affair——!

But the Dook’s reply gave Porter what he describes as the three greatest surprises of his whole school career.

It proved the Head to be a sport; it proved him to have an unpleasant but still subtle sense of humour; and (again to quote Porter’s shameful words), it proved the old reprobate to be a better liar than any of his boys.

“Not at all, my dear,” he blandly answered. “Porter will some day be, I hope, one of my prae-postors and we have been discussing discipline. We both thoroughly agree in the principle which I brought forward—that though Head Masters, through a sense of wishing to spare a big boy’s dignity, generally try not to cane fellows in the

Sixth (say) or the First Eleven, yet *if* there arose a case where such a boy consistently tried to be insolent and to "score off" his Head Master, the latter would be perfectly justified, supposing he could once well and truly catch him out, in stopping the constant nuisance and the danger to school discipline by giving him a thoroughly good flogging."

"I knew it would be something sawdusty," laughed Mrs. Cumberland, taking a big teapot from the butler, "but I never expected it to be quite so bloodthirsty."

Porter silently agreed.

"Now then, Porter," she went on, turning to him, "you'll have some tea, won't you? You must be thirsty after that!"

Porter was thirsty; but before he could answer, the Dook, pushing back his own now empty cup, rose from the sofa.

"No, my dear," he said. "Porter does not want any tea. You'll have *your* guests arriving in a minute, so he and I will finish our shop talk in my study."

"Well, it seems most unsociable," she said, smiling, as she shook "Beer's" hand; "but you must come again soon as *my* guest. I promise I will treat you better."

Porter, feeling about fifty different sorts of fool, stuttered out some reply and followed the Head Master from the room.

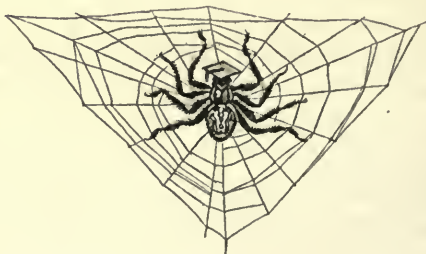
In the doorway he ran against Twiss and Darton. They glanced at him—at his expression—and certainly they did look as though they had got a surprise.

Porter, however, had no time to exult over the success obtained by this, the main part of his adventure as arranged. Walking along the corridor that leads to the Head Master's study, with the grim, silent, athletic figure of its owner a few feet ahead, he found a final grievance against fate.

Of course, this *would* happen on a day when he was wearing flannel bags!

VII

It may be due to the fact that, after this day, the Dook and Porter came to realize that they both possessed very much the same idea of humour; but anyhow, whatever the cause, from this time their sparring took on an extremely genial, almost private, turn. Porter, duly a praepostor, never made an effort to regain his lost prestige—so far, that is, as the Dook only was concerned; and both while boy and Old Boy had many pleasant teas in the School House as an invited guest.





VENDETTA



HIS is a story of Wilson's in the days when it was known as the worst House at Sherborough and gloried in that name. Many Houses claimed to be the best : in fact, all the others found some peculiar reason for deserving that proud place : but only one was thoroughly content to be admitted on all sides the worst. Wilson's was a spot apart ; a spot with its own ways ; a spot no average Sherburian was curious to explore.

It has been said that a city is the men it holds. This is true also of a House. Stone and Best had largely made Wilson's what it was. True, even before their arrival, it had been a bad House : it was young, and its founder (known to Sherburians as Weary Willie) had lacked the energy to make it grow, during a ten-year life, in either strength or virtue : but it was these two worthies who had first made the Willieites actually glory in their slackness.

First Eleven colours? . . . cups? . . . Other Houses might be keen on childish things like this: but Stone, comfortably arranging his great limbs to fit a canvas chair, laughed at their folly as a sane man of the world. Fancy going out splashing in cold mud to win a rotten silver pot! No: *he* could kick a ball about as well as any one, if he desired: and Best, his weedy hanger-on (who certainly could *not*), was only too glad that the great man's tastes were such as he could share without incurring ridicule by his inferior skill. So they slacked about in well-pressed clothes pulled high to show their fancy socks, and read the racing news, and talked of "Town," and smoked when safely out of bounds, and generally behaved as what they thought to be real men of the world.

How Dick Hunter, keen sportsman and intolerant of wasters—member of the Crew and School goal-keeper—was brought from the School House into Wilson's, with the idea of reformation, and what a savage duel followed has been fully set forth in another place. This is a minor engagement in the great campaign, never recorded until now.

II

Stone and Best were, for the moment only, in despair.

They knew, of course, that in the end the victory must be theirs: for were they not men of seasoned experience in the Big World and Hunter a mere beefy player of kid-games? But for the moment,

they admitted freely, beef was—so to speak—up in the market and worldly knowledge badly down.

Half a term had passed, and during those few weeks Hunter had scored victory after victory, crowned by the reduction of Stone from his position as a Monitor: whilst they on their side could claim only one success: by free use of threats and not too close attention to the truth, they had brought it about that nobody in Wilson's ever spoke to Hunter. This would have been a greater victory if they had felt quite sure that he was keen to speak to *them*. . . . Hunter, however, they told themselves, had always put on lift and despised the Willieites. He made it quite plain now that he preferred the conversation of his old pals, away, in the School House.

Yes, Hunter had distinctly scored—so far; and Stone was not well pleased.

“Look here,” he said one day during evening lock-ups, “*you’ve* just got to think of something, Worst.” (It was his notion of a joke to call Best by this more appropriate name.) “You used to be full of bright ideas till this term, you know. What’s come over you?”

“That swine Hunter’s rotten little wangy cane has come *across* me,” Best replied. He always found humour a good card to play, when his lord showed signs of getting scornful. Stone, naturally muscular, despised—and not altogether secretly—his ally’s puny arms and chest, his miserable cowardice: but Best in turn was naturally quick of

wit and could at will (it was too dangerous to try it often) make Stone feel a clumsy fool, ashamed.

His repartee on this occasion failed of its effect. Stone laughed indeed, but not at the play on words. He laughed at its maker, and with ill-hidden contempt. "Funking?" was all that he remarked.

Best felt the red blood flowing to his cheeks; a weakness he especially disliked. "Who's funking?" was all that he could manage in the circumstances.

"You are," retorted Stone, who felt that he must be developing his wit if he could score off Best like this. Really quite neat, eh? He gave a self-satisfied chuckle: and the third member present in study number nine—a timid, pasty-looking new boy with the impressive name of Strongham—quite saw that this was his cue to be amused. He ventured a sickly, abrupt giggle: and then looked nervously at the tyrant, to make sure that he was pleased.

Best, in any case, was not. "What are *you* spluttering about, young Weakbacon?" he enquired with a blustering air.

"What Stone said," answered Strongham tremulously.

"Oh, and what was that?" Best could be very fierce indeed—to any one a foot shorter than himself.

"Why, 'you are,'" said the new boy, more and more faintly as he grew less and less certain about the wisdom of his entry on this scene at all. The best way, he began to think, to get on in number nine was to sit silent until Stone wanted an excuse to kick you. . . .

"Oh, so *I* am, am I?", Best tried to thunder in his squeaky voice, only too glad of a chance to turn the conversation's course. *He* didn't want to be dragged any further into the fight with Hunter. Strongham was far easier game. "I'm funking, am I? You call me a funk? You, a rotten little new scum——" He arose and seized a cricket-stump, on which Stone had largely relied since the confiscation by Hunter of a leather strap. "I'll jolly well teach you——"

"Not so fast," said Stone, and snatched the weapon so roughly that the other exclaimed, "Oh, I say, look out. Mind my knuckles, can't you?"

Strongham began to revive in hope, but did not care to see that cricket-stump in Stone's right hand. He liked it better standing in the corner with the pads and bat. . . .

"You know jolly well, Worst," said the great man, "that you're fed if Strongham doesn't laugh when you think you're scoring off me."

"I jolly well know that he *daren't*," laughed Best with desolating scorn. "He only giggles to grease up to you. Anybody can see that."

And now indeed the new boy was in terror and despair. Not only were his real motives suddenly dragged into the full light of day, but he found himself in the terrible position of being a cause of war between these two, each terrifying in his own peculiar—most peculiar—way.

"I'm sorry," he said vaguely to the world at large.

Luckily Stone, always beyond explanation, turned

his wrath unexpectedly against the informer. "That's a rotten thing to say," he sternly declared. "I've heard you say some rotten things, but never anything rottener than that. Only giggles to grease up to me, indeed! That's like saying I'm such a dirty bully that the kid's in terror of me. Is that true, Strongham?" He turned to the junior, who suddenly felt his body drop, an inch at least, from the knees upward. "Are you afraid of me?"

"N—no," he stammered, half feeling he had been trapped into signing the warrant for his execution. Not afraid of Stone!

"You see," said Stone in triumph. "Now, don't you think it was a rotten thing to say? Aren't you going to apologize to me for saying I'm a bully and to him for saying he's a greaser?"

Best knew this note of old, and did not care for it. "Don't rag, Brick," he said lightly. "I never said you were a bully. Chuck that bally stump down and let's go on with our talk." Even the first topic seemed better, now, than this.

"Oh, so you withdraw about me?" went on Stone, thoroughly wound up to his best bullying mood. "Then it's only Strongham you've got to apologize to now."

"Oh, chuck it!" laughed Best with an ease ill assumed.

"Come along, my boy," proceeded the merciless voice. Best knew the whole method, the whole scene, so well—but as a rule he took good care that the criminal was some one else and he himself a

spectator in Court only. "Apologize at once, or else——" and the stump waggled ominously.

"I say, Brick! Come, you know," began Best, now at his last gasp, "that's a bit stiff. I dare say, perhaps—but really, apologize to a new scum like that!"

"Very well," was the grim reply of Justice. "Strongham, now and then we've had to chastise you for your soul's good. Now it is your turn to chastise your friend and study-sharer, Best, for a disgraceful and rotten remark about yourself." With an overdone courtesy he held the cricket-stump out for Strongham to take. He had a rough humour of his own.

"Oh, please, Stone," murmured the new boy, appalled by visions of Best's later vengeance. "I don't want——"

"You don't want to have a double dose yourself instead. You don't want to be tied up by your wrists from the window bar there. You don't want to be ducked twenty-four times running next time you go to the baths. You don't want—or do you? *Do you want——?*"

He paused, his imagination all exhausted, but luckily it was enough. "No, no," said Strongham twice, to make sure there was no mistake, and very gingerly he took the stump.

"A nice dozen, I think," Stone said reflectively. "Now then, over, my boy, quick!" He pointed at the desk.

"No," answered Best in fury. This was too much. He had suffered many ills, many indignities,

many insults in his wish to remain friends with his patron; but this was too much. "I'm blowed if I do! There!"

"Then you'll be blowed," cried Stone. He felt quite brilliant to-day. . . .

"Oh, I say, look out!" came Best's usual refrain as Stone's burly arms grappled his thin body and he found himself, amid struggles and protests, slowly, relentlessly, easily being arranged in a far more convenient attitude for punishment than merely leaning over any desk. One last effort was essential. How all the other juniors would laugh at Strongham's story—and they were cheeky enough as it was if Stone chanced to be away, beastly little swine. . . . He kicked out wildly, feeling almost powerful, and getting a fierce joy from Strongham's shriek as his boot struck the small boy's knee or from the sound of falling chairs and rattle of crockery as he upset the table. Stone always despised him: he knew that. Well, now he should see that there *was* some strength, some pluck in him after all! These were the most strenuous moments of his life to date.

Strength, however, we all know, will tell: and it told no uncertain tale. Stone, an amused look on his certainly handsome if no less unattractive face, sat contemptuously on the wooden chair and with neither haste nor effort disposed his victim in the exact attitude that he desired. Best, feeling very martial and every inch a man, was none the less in a babe-like manner being put all the while into a convenient position. This took the form of

having his neck gradually forced down till it was between Stone's knees, where it found itself locked in what journalists would call a vice. His head rested uncomfortably beneath the chair's hard seat.



"Best waited patiently
for what must happen"

Realizing that every movement meant a painful bump against this last, he soon stopped his struggles, which he complacently felt had been quite terrific. Stone, who had never risen from the chair and was not even breathing fast, smiled scornfully; Best waited patiently for what must happen; Strongham, stump in hand, expected with no less dread the word

of command; and for a moment all was still in the small study.

It was at this very moment that Dick Hunter entered.

The sound of a shriek, shouted protests, smashing china, and the thud of falling chairs, had drawn him down the passage. He was not surprised to trace its source to study number nine.

As the door opened, Stone swung his head round but otherwise no one in the group moved a muscle anywhere. It was like something out of Madame Tussaud's. Hunter could not withhold a smile at Best's well-planned attitude.

"So that's it, this time?" he said dryly. "Well, I'm glad it's not a new kid, for once. I dare say the punishment's deserved! All the same, I'm not sure Strongham is the man to give it. Drop that stump, see? Let him up, Stone. We can't have this foul row in lock-ups."

Stone, with a look of haughty surprise, swung his knees apart. Something in the slow, calm way he did it made obedience an insult. He said nothing, but he looked a lot. Best, very red of face from his unwonted attitude, got up, not sure whether to feel grateful or annoyed at Hunter's interference.

Hunter had spoken as pleasantly as could be expected in the circumstances: but nothing that he said sounded welcome in the ears of Stone. Stone was annoyed, even, that the Head Boy waited to see his orders obeyed.

"Is that all we can do for you?" he asked with irony in a shop-walker voice.

"No," answered Dick Hunter, stung by his cool insolence. "You can do something else. You can just remember that this is the third time this week I've had to come in here to stop a beastly row. You can also remember that you're not a Monitor any longer now, and any one who's not can be licked by a Monitor for cheek. Is that enough to go on with 'for you'?"

And waiting a moment for an answer that—prudently enough—was not forthcoming, he closed the door of study number nine with an exaggerated quietness and whistled his way back along the corridor.

III

"Look what *you've* let me in for, you silly ass," growled Stone, upon the door's other side. "Nice for me, isn't it, to be threatened with a licking when only a few days ago I was a Monitor myself? And all because you make such a beastly fuss about taking a dozen from a weedy little ass that couldn't hurt a spider!"

Best felt that this was a horribly unfair light in which to regard the plucky fight he had put up: turning it round into cowardice! He also felt the conversation still to be along lines full of peril to himself. Now, however little he might be a match for his friend in conflict of the body, he never had any fear about his victory in duels of the spoken word.

"It was all young Strongham's fault there," he

said, playing a safe card. "What did he want to cheek me for? Why need he come pushing his dirty little nose between us? He ought to be jolly glad to be sitting in a study with us two, instead of interrupting when we're trying to think out a plan to score off that swine Hunter."

Stone, in the excitement of subduing Best and of Hunter's entry, had almost forgotten how the episode began. This version, in any case, was good enough for him. He was always glad to hear that some new boy needed taking down—and that last reference to schemes for the defeat of Hunter was a master-stroke.

"Friend Strongham we must leave for a bit," he said. "We can't risk bringing Hunter in again." (This goes to prove that the new Head Boy's methods, if rough, were at least effective.) "But that's what worries me," he said, suddenly depressed. "What can we do against the beast? I'd love—but I know he's only waiting for an excuse to get me into Caput" (the which is Sherburian for the Monitors' end-study) "and across a chair. He's dying to have my name up on his beastly notice board, and that's why—look here," he said, abruptly changing the course of his broken reverie, "now you've let me in for—for that just now, you'll jolly well *have* to find a way to score him off, to make him look an ass, the smug conceited fool: so no more rot about it, see?"

Best, fairly driven back to his original unloved position, set himself perforce to think. A heavy and rare silence brooded over number nine. Strong-

ham gazed at the photograph of his Mother (on which kind Best had added an opulent red moustache in ink) and wondered if those first longed-for holidays would find him still alive to be restored to her. She was an upholder of tutors against preparatory schools: she had said she could not spare her darling boy before he reached his teens: so here he was, suddenly plucked from a too-kind home and flung direct into the society of what he could only look upon as desperadoes. It was a black unjust business, certainly. . . .

Best's inspiration, on arrival, made it blacker.

"*I know,*" he said suddenly. "*I've got it.*"

"Spit it out, then," was all the surly thanks he got.

"It's nothing very big," said Best. "We can't afford that just at present: but it'll make pal Hunter look a silly ass, and what's more," he added viciously, "it'll pay a part of our debt to young Stoutsausage here."

Strongham, who had learnt to answer to almost any name, tore his eyes from the consoling face and turned them, bulging like a frightened rabbit's, on the ugly countenance of Best.

"That's good enough," this gained from the expectant overlord.

Best was encouraged to proceed. "You know how bucked the smirking idiot is at sitting up at the High Table for lunch with old Weary Willie, where *you* used to sit?" (This was a sound touch.) "Well, my idea is this. What a silly ass he'd look—after a bit—if there were never any knives or spoons

or anything for him! Of course, we'd tell every one to laugh."

"The maids wouldn't do it," Stone objected.

"Strongham will," came the retort. It says much for the new boy's intellect that he had guessed this before it was spoken. "The maids clear out before any one comes in for call-over, the Monitors come in last, and Weary Willie's always late. Now—see?"

"I do," remarked Stone. "It's nothing much, as you say; I'd like something bigger: but he'll be hugely fed when it goes on and on, and the great thing is this," he went on with emphasis, "that he can never trace the thing to us. Understand, Strongham, *we* know nothing of it. Your job is to see you're not caught. It's no affair of ours at all."

IV

Strongham did his labour well. That was a lesson he had learnt so soon in Wilson's. He took the knife and forks and spoon: he hid them carefully where the maids would find them only when clearing the room for prayers: and sat expectantly, in dread.

"Agnes, *bring* me a knife and fork, will you, please?" asked the Head Boy presently. He thought nothing of it—a mere mistake—until the whole Hall laughed, and laughed in a not altogether natural manner.

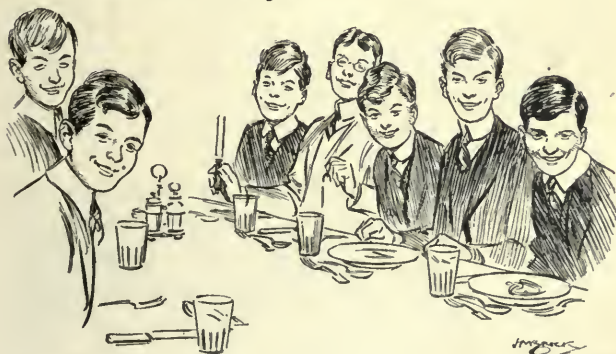
He thought more of it, next day, when precisely the same thing occurred; the laughter this time being loud.

He thought so much of it that he turned into study number nine during that evening's lock-ups.

"I say, Stone," he asked, "I suppose it isn't by any chance you who take a fancy each day to my knife and things?"

"Oh no," came the contemptuous reply, as though he never would worry with small things like that.

The whole Hall laughed



"Nor you, Best?"

"No." This more polite: Best had learnt his lesson inside Caput.

"Sorry," said Dick quite sincerely. "I only thought I'd ask." He went out, puzzled. He knew they were not liars anyhow.

"Worst," Stone murmured after a safe interval, "you are a genius. It can go on for ever now."

Strongham, who had just begun to breathe again, stopped the silly trick abruptly.

V

Dick had scarcely got back into Caput before he saw the game and realized his own stupidity. The whole thing summed itself in one word : Strongham ! That pasty little babe, then, was being educated as their tool, trained to take their place as hooligan-in-chief when they were called—or sent—away !

Dick was too proud to go back. Besides, he had a sense of humour. . . .

He sat down and thought.

VI

Strongham was sitting quietly in number nine. He had a Henty, which had somehow survived in the House library, and a pound of cherries.

The sun was shining, and the sound of bat and ball came in through a wide-open window ; but he was not tempted. The opportunity to be alone, at peace, was rare.

Suddenly down the passage floated the all too familiar cry of “ Fag ! Fa-a-a-ag ! ”

Strongham got up with all the protesting slowness of a weary housemaid. What could a fag be wanted for at three o'clock ? Besides, it sounded like Hunter's voice, and Hunter, he knew, was coaching the boat on the river.

It was duly Hunter who sat in Caput and yelled for his henchman ; Hunter in rowing shorts and a Crew blazer. He had left the House boat to catch



A Henty and a pound
of cherries

its crabs in solitude awhile. He had other work to do, and he had chosen his own time.

"Oh, Strongham," he said, looking up genially, "I've something for you to do."

"Yes," the fag answered, seeing his afternoon of ease all disappear. Hunter or some one always *did* have something for one to do. To-day had been a miracle. He could not understand how he had been let off both nets and House game. Now, it seemed, there was something else. . . .

It was, however, nothing to be done this afternoon.

"The maids," said Hunter very slowly, looking straight at the fag standing close before him, "have got careless or gone mad just lately. For five days running I've not had a place laid for me at lunch. So now you'll have to do it, see? From to-day it's your job to see that, before the Monitors come in, there's a knife and fork and everything for me. Quite understand?"

Strongham understood—quite.

He did not know that Hunter guessed the truth; but he quite understood his own position—ordered by Hunter to see the rotten things were there, ordered by Stone to see that they were *not*. . . .

"Ye—es," he answered, trembling.

Hunter, no less, understood: felt sorry for the pasty little shrimp; but there was the making in him of a second Stone. Always keen to steer free of a game and now playing tricks with Monitors—no, Wilson's had no use for *that* sort of Strongham! Hunter felt sorry for him, but he must save his shrimp-like soul. Besides, there was Stone always

in the background, to be got at somehow. . . . This was the beginning only . . .

"That's all, thanks," he said cheerily.

As Strongham slouched wearily to number nine, he thought of all the heroes in history or Henty who had suffered awful things, been placed in terrible positions: but he could think of none who had ever been in such a hole as this. Even un-ripe cherries were no consolation.

VII

"But I don't *want* to, Stone," Strongham's appeal ended. "Hunter told me to see they were there, and I don't want to take them away any more." He was half a baby still.

Stone looked at him coldly. "Look here, young Strongham," he said. "I *know* you came straight from home. It may be that, but just let me tell you that you've jolly well got a wrong idea of school life if you think it matters a hang what you want or don't want to do. I've told you what you've *got* to do, and that's enough for you; see?"

He looked very fierce, and Strongham must have owned the courage of despair to risk argument. "But Hunter told me not to do it," he replied.

"Is Hunter always in the study with you?" Stone retorted. "Can he see that you never sit down all lock-ups, except when Willie's coming round? Can he burn your rotten photographs? Can he see you never have the proper book for second lesson?" Here, as usual, his invention

failed, so that after a brief abortive interval for thought, he closed the catalogue of punishments and said: "Hunter won't worry. He'll think you are a careless little swine and curse you for forgetting and then tell another fag to do it. Won't he, Worst?"

"Rather!" said Best, but not with much conviction. He was still sore, in two senses, after his visit to Caput.

This conversation goes some way towards explaining why once again, at next day's lunch, the Head Boy had no place laid for him, and louder than ever rose the laughter and suppressed mock-cheering.

Hunter sent for Strongham after lunch.

"Look here," he said, "you may have forgotten or it may be something else. Some one may be forcing you to do it. I'm not going to ask, see?—because I don't believe in sneaking: but I just want you to realize one thing. You're new to school and you mayn't understand. *I'm* the only head of this House, see?—and when I order things done, they're going to get done. Otherwise——" and without more words he took a thin cane from behind the table.

He did not mean to use it upon Strongham: it was reserved for—well, some one else: but the act impressed Strongham more than all Stone's threats. There was a convincing reserve about this Hunter: he meant what he said, that was clear, whilst Stone threatened more than he could do.

"I see," he answered hastily.

"That's all right, then," smiled the Head Boy

in a pleasant manner, and put the cane down on the table.

The new boy went out. He was just beginning, between his two tutors, to understand life at a Public School—or let us rather say, at Wilson's. . . .

The knife and fork were there all right at one o'clock next day.

VIII

Hunter left tea early that evening.

As a rule the Monitors, (who always arrived late,) sat at their table long after the rank and file had finished tea and gone. To-night he got up suddenly and went out, with no word of explanation.

It was equally strange that, on arriving at the corner of the study passage, he should stand for a few moments and listen intently. Presently he seemed to hear the sound for which he listened. He strode quickly up the passage and entered study number nine.

Strongham was on the floor. On Strongham was Stone. Strongham's arms were pinned beneath Stone's knees. Strongham was on his face, spread-eagle, and Stone was sitting upon Strongham's head. That useful cricket-stump was in his hand. The tableau needed very little explanation.

Hunter took it in at once.

"Get up, Stone," he said icily and then: "I've warned you before about bullying small kids."

The other took up a superior, man-of-the-world air. "You've got to keep them in their place,"

was the Head Boy who spoke, and in a different manner. All his pleasantness had gone.

"Look here, Stone," he said, "I've been wanting a word with you. We may as well have things out between us."

"Sit down, won't you?" interrupted Stone.

Hunter carefully ignored the insult. "I know quite well, of course," he said, "what Strongham's done—or rather, hasn't done. I saw it a few days ago. I ought to have guessed even sooner that you'd shove some wretched new kid forward to do the dangerous work and hide somewhere safe, yourself. Only, you see, I've got you now."

"Oh!" Stone answered, still cool. "I don't quite see how."

"I do," said Hunter smilingly. "If Strongham goes on laying my place—or rather, leaving it alone!—your little game is ended: and I think he will. If he doesn't, it'll be because you bully him: and if you bully him once more, I warn you now that you'll end along in Caput."

"Me?" asked Stone, looking even bigger than he was.

"Yes, *you*!" Hunter answered. "Why not? You're not a Monitor or First. Of course you will. In fact, I've got a cane all ready."

"Is that all?" Stone enquired, furious yet not quite daring to risk a more venturous remark.

"I think so," said Hunter easily. "I thought we'd better have this matter out. You see just how it is? Strongham won't do anything unless you bully him. So if Strongham *does* do any

more, I shall haul *you* next morning for bullying. Is that quite clear? The same refers of course to any other kid. So now you can't say I've not warned you. If it amuses you, go on every lunch-time. I've got used to it, and probably the exercise just after breakfast will be good for me."

Stone made no answer. He was quite beyond it.

Strongham felt like a mariner who sees the harbour-lights after long, weary days of tempest.

Hunter smiled even more pleasantly than usual, and turned to go.

IX

Next day the Head Boy's place was laid with the same precision, the result of practice, as any other place. And so it was, in fact, (as story-tellers say,) "for ever after."



The MAD ENGLISH.



MEN who travelled in France, before the Great War came to set nations at loggerheads or draw them together, would sometimes overhear by chance the phrase: *Ces fous Anglais*—"these mad English."

Nowadays we understand each other better.

In every race, however, there are just a few who may be rather slow to learn.

MOST boys, luckily, grow up with a deep respect for their fathers' beliefs; but here and there is found a luckless son who has to live them down.

Ted Murray came under the second class. Himself a thoroughgoing sportsman, with all the healthy faiths and failings of an ordinary fag, he possessed a parent who, to speak generally, believed in nothing. More accurately, Mr. Murray believed in garden

cities. He believed in garden cities and everything that sometimes follows in their train ; for though it is a very beautiful and, in fact, hygienic notion to live in a suburb that has the appearance rather of a Tudor village in the apple-district, it has unhappily been proved that its attraction is specially evident to the faddist whose war-cries are Health and the New Life.

Mr. Murray was a quite conscientious faddist. He did not believe in meat, but equally did he eschew cigars and utterly refuse the easy path of pinning his faith complacently to beer. He was undoubtedly sincere. Over a breakfast of cocoa and assorted nuts he read his *Daily News* and shuddered at the sins of a dissolute and unhygienic world. Needless to add that he was anti-everything. He would have suffered all the diseases known to science rather than think that even one mouse had been vivisected under anæsthetics to find him relief ; he would cheerfully have suffered murder in his bed, if hanging could be proved the only cure for that distressing habit ; he would have been garrotted nightly if the poor criminal could be deterred only by a flogging ; and when in winter-time the local nut-fed boys hurled balls of snow at his pot-hat he never raised an angry cane, but merely murmured, " Naughty ! Naughty ! "

On this point of punishment he was, indeed, quite firm in his first interview with the Head Master.

" My boy Edward," he said proudly, " has been educated—and by educated I do *not* mean taught anything—along the most scientific lines of modern thought."

Mr. Sankey, the Head Master, planted his feet firmly, held on to his chair, and repressed an exclamation of alarm.

“Probably, therefore,” the other went on with slow self-satisfaction, “I need not discuss with you the question of punishment at all. The occasion almost certainly will not arise. Edward is a man fully equipped, so far as morality is in the question. He is a complete citizen. He is thirteen and a half years of age and has never yet been punished.”

The Head Master, despite his efforts, let out a little gasp. “Precisely,” he added, before he realized that it meant nothing.

“Please understand, however,” the parent said firmly, “that I am strongly opposed to corporal punishment in any form, not only on behalf of my boy but because of the fierce passions that it arouses in the master.”

Mr. Sankey gazed in cold silence, for some moments, at the crank before him. His first instinct was to decline a pupil who involved so troublesome a parent. Then—then his thoughts turned in pity to the boy himself, to Edward; the “man fully equipped” in morals; the “complete citizen”; the paragon who “never had been punished.” Poor little Edward, doomed through life to be a pestilential prig!

He hedged.

Corporal punishment, he explained, was a rule of the School, but Edward—it seemed clear—was never likely to deserve it. In any case, the sort of thrashing that could rouse “fierce passions” was totally

unknown. Every punishment was thoroughly judicial, given only after consultation with himself. About this his staff was absolutely loyal. Such a thing as the boxing of a boy's ears or blows given in anger could never happen in any House or Form at Cliborough. And much more to the same effect.

Finally, after not less full discussion of diet (vegetarian), underwear (hygienic), and a dozen equally absorbing topics, they parted; each utterly dissatisfied but both hoping for a different best.

II

Ted Murray came as a surprise when he arrived for the entrance examination. When he entered the School as a full-fledged Cliburian he burgeoned into something very near a shock.

"And as to diet," said the Head Master, regarding with secret wonder this healthy, cheerful boy so different from his chalk-faced, gloomy parent, "I will, of course, arrange for you to have the nut-breakfast as laid down by your father."

Murray's reply to this may be taken as typical of his whole attitude to garden cities and their works.

"Oh, *that*?" he said casually. "But I'd much rather have the usual stuff. The other thing, you know, is only dad's idea."

Much else, in the next few days, proved "only dad's idea," for if Ted Murray, at the age of thirteen, was sufficiently a child to call his father "dad" in public, he was equally enough of a boy to have certain ambitions not to be expected in a "complete

citizen " at all. These became clear increasingly as the first days went on. They were: Firstly, to do just the exact amount of work that he was violently forced to do; and, secondly, to get out of life every ounce of fun that an adept in solemn ragging could possibly extract.

III

In the second aim Fortune, who (the Latin grammar tells us) plays an insolent game, seemed utterly resolved to help Ted Murray. He came to Cliborough in the year 1916, when most of the regular masters had been called away whether by conscience or compulsion to the Army, to munition factories, to every variety of war-work; leaving their places for men untrained in the wiles and subtleties of healthy boyhood. Among these new recruits none wore a more worried or dazed air than Monsieur Frapotel.

The French Master has long since become a stale affair in fiction. All the blunders of the comic school yarn, all the crimes of penny thrillers, have been laid unjustly on his shoulders. Those who have fought in the trenches of France know well by now what manner of fine man the Frenchman is. And yet—and yet how irresistible, to try to rag a foreigner; above all, one who has not been a master; who asks what he shall do, believes the most ridiculous of answers, and gazes out across the room with a desperately fierce but above everything a puzzled air!

Murray, as might have been expected in a new boy, was all sympathy for this newcomer. Outwardly, that is. Monsieur Frapotel thought him a delightful boy—at first. In a moment of expansion he referred to him, in conversation with the matron, as being “almost ’uman.” Even when the other boys, all “mad as savages,” were in an uproar, Murray would quietly remark—sometimes in French—that it was shameful, scandalous, and they should all be punished. Certainly this did not quell the riot, and in fact seemed only to cause laughter ; but, as monsieur explained to the sympathetic Mrs. Dawson, it showed “the good intent.”

Gradually, however, he began to doubt the truth of this conclusion and to wonder whether the other masters were after all correct when, in the Common Room, they singled out Murray, from the new boys, as most likely to give trouble.

“*Another* humorist !” said Mr. Jenkins sadly. He was the sole survivor of the peace-time staff ; had taught science at Cliborough for twenty years ; and been ragged solidly for just the same period of time. He spoke with resignation now.

“A solemn humorist,” added the bursar dimly.

These words came back to Monsieur Frapotel when, in the second week of term, he entered his Form room one day to find the boys suspiciously silent but with a threatening air of excitement. As he sat down at his desk, amid an unusual quiet, his eyes lit on Murray.

Murray, very serious and obviously anxious for the lesson to begin, was perched precariously on the



top of a high wooden ventilator-shaft. His legs swung in the air; he held his First French Reader open wide like a psalter: he was all attention.

Monsieur Frapotel, suspicious, gazed up at him across the room's whole length.

"Murr-hay," he said, with a new sternness in his voice, "come you down! What do you there?"

"I see and hear better, sir." So soon the titters began. The Third Form, to a man, agreed with the bursar's shrewd summing-up of Murray.

"What?" shouted Monsieur Frapotel, now certain of his victim.

"*Je trouve*," elaborately answered Murray, "*que je vois et écoute mieux, monsieur*." (Roars of laughter.)

"Murr-hay, I give you one 'ondred lines if you do not descend."

"But, sir——" A plaintive note had crept into his voice. "*J'écoute mieux*," he murmured, in reproach.

"One 'ondred lines," said monsieur, sure that he was doing well at last. "Descend!"

"Oh, sir," came the wail of protest, but no sign of movement.

"Murrhay, two 'ondred lines." He noted it down coldly, feeling a new sense of power.

"But, sir—what for? It isn't fair. *Je vois mieux. Ce n'est pas juste*."

"Spik English, boy," roared the French Master. "I comprehend it well." Then, as a snigger ran along the desks, "*Four 'ondred lines*."

The Form by now was thoroughly interested and delighted. How far Monsieur Frapotel actually

"comprehended" English might be doubtful; but it seemed probable that he could count up to a thousand. . . . This international duel—lines *v.* lip, it might be called—thus became a sporting proposition. Odds were offered, and freely taken, among the bigger boys. They generously favoured Murray.

"Six 'ondred lines—eight 'ondred—a t'ousand"—(the last greeted with general applause)—so did the *affaire* progress, with some of the outer semblance of an auction. "Twailve 'ondred—fourteen 'ondred"—there seemed no limit to monsieur's arithmetical knowledge.

At the last figure (to use a trade term) Murray put in a mild protest.

"*Mais, monsieur, non. Il est trop. Je ne peux les faire.*"

"Spik English," repeated the other. "And sixteen 'ondred lines. Descend." He motioned downwards with his arm.

Murray, still far more solemn than any known variety of owl, assumed at this exact point an air of unutterable surprise.

"Must I get *down*, sir?" came the wondering question.

"But of course. 'Ave I not said so twenty, thirty times? Descend."

"Oh!" muttered Murray. "Now I see. *Descendre*—'to get down.' " So saying, he dropped, loudly, like a coal-sack, on the floor; and with a disarming smile, "It's the same in Latin, isn't it, sir—nearly?"

"*Descendere*," replied the master, delighted at a

chance to show his general knowledge. "It is a r-root word. Sit there, Murr-r-hay. We will now begin." (9.22 a.m.)

Had he after all been right, the bursar wrong? Was this boy friendly, keen, and merely a bit foolish? He began to wonder.

His wonder, combined with the abject apologies of Murray, who came up afterwards to "ram off the lines," took him to a point whence it was easy for the boy to persuade him that the whole affair had been one vast misunderstanding, due to ambiguities in the two tongues. This Murr-rhay was foolish, true; but punish him for that? *Mais non!*

He cancelled his first imposition.

The rest, to use Ted's own phrase, was "too easy."

IV

Articles, even books, have been written on such a variety of boring subjects, that it is a pity no one has ever answered fully upon paper the very interesting question why it is that one master can be ragged but another not.

Whatever the reason, it has nothing in the world to do with social popularity. Monsieur Frapotel was liked by all. Everybody called him a good sort: everybody ragged him. Probably it never occurred to any one that he could possibly object. He was so pleasant, always, out of school. . . .

Murray, in particular, thought him an old dear (he was barely forty), and made his life a finished misery.

Nothing was too ingenious, nothing too far-

fetched, if it could raise a laugh against the poor French Master. That these wild exploits made the new boy popular among a certain set was never accounted (let it be said, in justice) by that humorist himself. It was from the mere joy of life, from the pure fun of mischief, that he presently transferred his operations from Monsieur Frapotel in person and waged war upon his hearth and home.

This last was placed temptingly for any boy with half an ounce of spirit or adventure; a little old-world bungalow or one-floor cottage—all ivy, thatch and woodwork—set in a small, pine-encircled garden all its own and taken by the School as overflow accommodation for the junior master. Monsieur Frapotel, at first sight of this picturesque but inappropriate abode, had murmured to himself, "*Ces fous Anglais*"; but on the second day, seeing its possibilities, he set to work and, adding to his few worldly treasures such antique china and other decorative trifles as the local shops provided, managed to make his little home a very comfortable and dainty place indeed. Boys invited to tea there on half-holidays reported that it was jolly decent, and its owner ditto.

Murray, however, took most interest in the cottage at such times as its inhabitant was out of it. At these seasons it was empty, for Monsieur Frapotel, having all his meals save tea up at the School, relied upon an ancient dame who merely made his bed, dusted the place, and then departed by midday.

She was a splendid worker; and he was the more

surprised one evening, on return, to find the whole place black with smoke and smuts and generally a good imitation of an iron-works in the Black Country. Having opened every door and window, the distracted owner tried in vain, with poker and newspaper, to induce his fire to send its fumes into the chimney as on other days.

Finally, almost gibbering with excitement, the French Master came up like a tank at the School site for aid.

Oddly, the first person he saw there was his tiresome, "mad" friend, Murray.

"*Mais que diable, monsieur?*" idiomatically enquired this last, seeing the dishevelled figure, grimed and sweating from his fruitless labours and the up-hill double.

"Ah, Murrhay," gasped the other, too upset to consider past feuds or even to forbid the use of his own language. "Quick, quick! Accompany me. Something of the most terrible 'as 'appened. My beautiful treasures, my charming 'ouse—" And with these words he once more broke into the laborious jog-trot and set out for his pinewood home. Ted Murray fell in silently behind.

It was noticeable, though Monsieur Frapotel quite failed to notice, that the small group of Cliburians who were attracted by this scene included almost all of Murray's boon companions. Appearing as by a miracle, they joined the run and all arrived at the small cottage (now belching smoke from every window) in a solid body. Monsieur halted and pointed silently towards the tragedy.

Never has any one received so much sympathy, such good advice. Even Job was not so lucky in his friends as Monsieur Frapotel.

"*Je ne vois pas de cause du tout*," said Murray in despair, at last.

"It is not natural," puffed monsieur.

"*Peut-être*," Murray ventured, "*c'est de la—how* do you say 'witchcraft,' sir?"

Without waiting for an answer, he dashed away and, beckoning to his friends, began to bring out the contents of the whole cottage.

Its owner was at first delighted, as dainty lamp-shades or pink table-cloths were rescued from the dirt within. When sofas and armchairs, even beds, began to join the pile, his doubts grew visibly. By the time that such hardy objects as kitchen tables or steel fenders came upon the scene and his whole garden had the air of an Irish eviction, he felt certain that he did not like it.

"No, no," he cried, waving his arms wildly. "You are good for me; but—no!"

Murray paused upon the threshold; a kitchen clock in one hand, a rolling-pin held like a sceptre in the other.

"But what then?" he exclaimed dramatically. Nearness to monsieur always made him very Gallic in language and gesture. He waved the objects in hands held expressively apart.

"I go," said the Frenchman, suddenly inspired, "to the 'ead Master for 'is aid."

This decision had an immediate and unexpected effect on the proceedings. The eviction ceased

abruptly. Even Ted Murray abandoned his idea of witchcraft and threw out quite a practical suggestion.

"Suppose, sir," he said, "I climbed up and saw if something is blocking the chimney? There might be a bird's nest."



"Thank you, Murrhaye. Thank you much." The boy, after all, had good in him!

Murray, after an adventurous ascent, wherein his hairbreadth escapes from a fatal fall horrified monsieur but secretly delighted all the rest, assumed a face and attitude of absolute amazement.

"*Extraordinaire!*" he shouted. Then, reaching out, he held up, for all to see, an ordinary roof slate

cut round in such a manner that it fitted the chimney-pot exactly yet was nowhere visible from down below. Then with a warning cry of "*Têtes!*" he flung it down among them.

Monsieur Frapotel, though amiable as man and inexperienced as master, was not by any means a fool. He looked at Murray, when the latter descended triumphantly for thanks; and what he saw in that boy's eyes, smiling above his solemn mouth, provided food for thought. Of proof, however, there was absolutely none; and Mr. Sankey, among other virtuous notions that had won him with the boys the evangelic title "*Dr. Moody,*" believed that it was wicked to ask the School for a confession because of the harm done to the culprit if he decided to keep silent.

Monsieur, suspicious and yet powerless, said nothing.

Two nights later, when he entered the dark interior of his dainty bungalow abode, he was startled and horrified by a collision with some vast, soft, warm, hairy, living object. Full of superstitious dread, he lit a match with shaky fingers. By its tremulous light he saw standing before him, resigned and motionless amid his bric-a-brac, a huge, shaggy-coated cart-horse.

V

Murray, possessed of such a delicate touch in the art of ragging as could belong to nobody but a "*complete citizen*" who had never been punished, was in

the habit of appeasing his chosen victim, Monsieur Frapotel, by an occasional good exercise. Having been brought up with a French nurse, he could keep

He lit a match
with shaky fingers



abreast of the Third Form without extending himself in the slightest. As a rule, however, his efforts were in quite the opposite direction. He strove hard and conscientiously to do worse than he was able. In conversation he used a jargon of which examples

already have been given, and on paper his chief joy was to bring off howlers that might seem unconscious to his master, among whose few failings was a lack of humour.

"She made a good match," for instance, would appear in Murray's answer as "*Elle faisait une bonne allumette*," to the delight of the whole Form, whilst "*on me traitait des lors*" would, of course, be rendered, "they treated me like a lord." It was both easy and effective. The sole difficulty lay in steering between two rocks equally disastrous. Murray was wrecked if his work became so bad that it was taken up to the Head Master, who well knew his real standard; but equally would he sink to depths irretrievable if monsieur once suspected that he was anything except a dunce at French.

Now and then, therefore, he subtly produced a bit of work not perfect by some distance, but yet creditable for a boy usually so full of blunders as himself. This staved off many a disaster, and allowed the longer run of a farce very much enjoyed by every member of the Form.

On the morning after his cart-horse adventure, Murray was not in any such conciliatory mood. For one thing, he was jubilant with his success, having left "D" dormitory by the fire-escape so thoughtfully provided and arrived at the cottage just as monsieur struck his match and with much French language hounded out the horse; for another, he reckoned that recent good work would allow him a little margin of behaviour to-day.

In all this he made two big errors.

He did not think for one moment that monsieur connected him with these peculiar happenings down



"An absolute knock-out
to Ted Murray"

at his house; also he began with a large tactical mistake.

"*Vous avez bien dormi, monsieur ?*" he blandly enquired, as the French Master entered.

That unhappy man snapped out a vicious negative

and glared at Murray. His suspicions were now turned to certainty—though still he had no proof.

Murray, gaily unconscious of what lay behind the other's face, went on with his pleasant hobby. He looked up, with large, innocent eyes, at Monsieur Frapotel, whose fingers were itching to get at this boy who (he now felt almost certain) had twice committed outrages upon his dainty home; this boy who was too clever to leave any clue; this boy who first disturbed his night and then enquired with sympathy how he had slept.

"*Non ?*" went on Murray, in tones of deep commiseration. "*J'espère ce n'était une cheval de nuit ?*"

This free rendering of "nightmare," with its insolently daring reference to the nocturnal cart-horse, proved the final straw for monsieur's capacity of patience.

"Murrhay, you are impertinent," he cried, and then this good-natured Frenchman gave a surprise to the whole Third but an absolute knock-out to Ted Murray.

He suddenly struck out at this humorist, caught him full upon the head, and knocked him off his desk on to the floor, where he lay prone and stunned for the statutory ten seconds.

VI

Ted Murray took this episode as in the scheme of things. It will generally be found that school humorists are also sportsmen.

Their fathers, unluckily, do not always share that quality nor do their young sisters invariably excel in tact.

Dorothy Murray, delighted next day to receive a full and good-humoured account of how the persecuted monsieur was "one up"—"*pro tem.*," the letter added, with a double underline—found it so humorous that she felt even her morose dad must surely see the fun.

She shared it with him, failing anybody else.

The apostle of garden cities and general humanity thus read with amazement these lines in his highly civilized son's writing—

"He got me a most royal smite, bang on the star-producing spot, a regular K.O. I fell like a log, the Form all say, and for a bit was absolutely out. Of course, I shan't take it lying down, although I did just then, and though I'm not off to sneak to the Head, as Moosoo seems to fancy from his horrible funk after, still he'll get his bit later, sure enough. I suppose he deserves a little fun for a change after all I've had, and certainly he *is* one up—*pro tem.* But, as he'd say, *nous verrons*. That means, 'wait and see.' "

"Isn't he funny?" asked the simple-minded Dorothy, as Mr. Murray made no comment at the end.

"*Very* funny," he answered after a long pause, with plenty of enthusiasm but a certain dryness.

VII

The first that the Head Master heard of the affair was when the butler entered, towards tea-time and announced that Mr. Murray had arrived and wished to see him if convenient. The parent, as he came into his room, held a sheet of paper in his hand, and entirely cutting all the usual courtesies, plunged direct into the matter.

"You told me, Mr. Sankey," he began, "at our preliminary interview, that any occurrence so degrading, so shameful, as a blow given in anger, a non-judicial punishment, was utterly impossible in the School under your control." He paused, merely for purposes of breathing.

"That," put in the Head Master complacently, "I still believe, Mr.—er—Murray, represents the fact."

"Read this, then," almost shouted the irate father.

Mr. Sankey, a strong contrast in his coolness, made no remark at all when he had finished. He merely touched the button of an electric bell.

"Go to the Third Form, Cummins," he said to the butler, "apologize to the master in charge, and say that I want to see Master Murray here at once. Say that his father has arrived."

As the man went out, a long and heavy silence fell. Mr. Murray was the first to feel it beyond bearing.

"You deny that, then?" he enquired huskily, pointing at the letter.

"I neither deny nor admit," the other answered

him in even tones. "I merely do not know. If true, it is a most disgraceful breach of trust, for which I can unluckily now do no more than apologize."

"It will not end with apologies," almost croaked Mr. Murray and could trust his voice no further.

The two men were again heavily silent when Ted Murray entered. He scarcely needed any word. The scene explained itself.

"Read this," said Mr. Sankey, taking the letter from the faddist's large-veined hand and giving it to Murray. "Did you write that letter?"

"Why did you not write to *me*, Ted?" suddenly exploded Mr. Murray in a choking voice. "Why should a shameful episode like this be retailed—and humorously—to my daughter? You should have wired for me at once. But all this later." (He tried to steady his voice vainly; but spoke in a lower tone.) "For the present, enough that I *have* heard of it and that I intend to drive the man who committed this outrage, not only from Cliborough, but from the whole profession of teaching he disgraces."

"Did you write that, Murray?" asked the Head Master coldly, as Mr. Murray's excited utterance died down.

The two men looked expectantly at Ted. The father, well launched upon his favourite hobby, asked nothing more than proofs that would incriminate this brutal Frenchman. The Head Master, anxious beneath his studied calm, realized that he was face to face with a situation full of dangers—police court proceedings; Press reports; newspaper correspondence—threatening the School he ruled

and loved. For each of them Ted Murray's answer meant a lot.

To both it came as a surprise.

That solemn humorist glanced at the letter—looked at the serious faces that watched his so intently—then burst suddenly into a roar of laughter.

Many a London actor would have done it worse.

VIII

“Murray,” asked the Head Master sternly, “what is the meaning of this extraordinary conduct?”

“I'm sorry, sir.” Murray appeared to struggle hard with his emotion. “But really I couldn't help—— You see, sir, I wrote this to green my sister!” And he began to laugh again.

“It isn't true then?” exclaimed Mr. Sankey, so relieved that he forgot to do the heavy schoolmaster and ask what Murray meant by “green.”

“Not true?” almost bellowed Mr. Murray. “This whole letter is a mere tasteless joke?”

“I wrote it to make Dorothy laugh.” No one ever, in all history, looked so simple, so utterly domestic—the complete citizen and son—as Murray at this moment. He added a late “dad.”

“Laugh!” bitterly exclaimed his father.

“Then we may take it, Murray,” put in the Head Master, wishing to draw the scene back on to a school basis, “that Monsieur Frapotel has never struck you, that these complaints are utterly without foundation—that you are quite content at Cliborough?”

"It's absolutely topping, sir," said Murray with a convincing enthusiasm that did not wait to choose its words.

It was Mr. Murray's turn to provide the next surprise. At this remark he uttered a cavernous groan of mixed agony and protest, snatched up his hat, and strode out of the room. A few seconds later the front door banged loudly.

"Of course, Murray," began the Head, after a few seconds in which he wondered what to say as end to so unconstitutional a scene, "you must understand that practical jokes of this description are most undesirable. What you wrote here was, in fact, a serious and wicked libel against Monsieur Frapotel, and might also, if shown to others, have done great harm to the reputation of your School."

He glanced up suddenly—a trick he often found impressive with small boys—and what he saw in Murray's face froze the further words he had half formed upon his lips.

It was not fear that he read there; not even mere amusement, though there was a twinkle, certainly, behind the eyes. The Head could not be certain what it was exactly, yet one thing was absolutely clear. This boy might be a little bit amused, but far more was he offended and surprised. Nowhere in all his face could there be found the slightest trace of guilt.

Mr. Sankey stopped his oration and stared at the boy before him in silent wonder.

Ted Murray, in his turn, gazed back, equally speechless, equally amazed.

Would he ever be so old, ever forget his youth so utterly, as to believe a rotten thing like that of any boy on earth? "A wicked libel" on a master—"great harm done" to the reputation of his School! Couldn't the Head at all remember the old days when he ragged masters; took what he got in return; and lied sooner than get anybody into trouble?

Perhaps Mr. Sankey read something of this in the other's eyes, for suddenly he broke the silence with a remark which made it seem as though he had remembered.

"Murray," he said with an excessive sternness but a twinkling eye, "if I believed for one moment that your father's threats against Monsieur Frapotel had led you into lying, I should give you a good flogging." Then, letting his frown change to a smile and unbending in a way that Murray had never believed possible in "Dr. Moody," "Go away, Murray," he said, patting the boy with clumsy affection on his shoulder, "go away before I beat you, and forget everything I said just now. I think Cliborough's reputation will be safe with *you*."

As the door closed, he stood for a moment in deep thought.

He was busy with the comforting reflection that heredity's balance does not incline always in favour of the father.

IX

Murray had spoken truer than he knew when he wrote of the French Master's "horrible funk after."

Monsieur Frapotel, horrified at what he had done

and seeing in it the end of his new career as teacher, had taken the first opportunity to make his peace with Murray. This last, however, anxious to retain a free hand for reprisals, showed no desire to smoke the pipe of peace. He maintained an attitude of polite hostility, which would justify him in continuing the feud. To sob on Moosoo's breast (he afterwards explained to a small audience), and then do him in, would be a little dirty.

The Frenchman, utterly misunderstanding this rather involved code of warfare, fed on a secret terror as the moment drew near when Murray would denounce him. A whole day and night passed; nothing occurred; the strain became too great.

Thus did it come to pass that, just as Mr. Sankey was about to send for the French Master in order to get at the truth about this episode, an agitated knock at the door heralded the entry of that gentleman—pale, anxious, explosive.

"Mistair Sankey," he began at once, without any further prelude. "I come to confess. I strike the boy Murrhay. I strike him very 'ard. He fall. I have had wrong, I know it, but he was impossible. I am only 'uman; I confess it. But I was kind for him, I did him much good, and now—why does he not come to you? It is that he delay because it make me pain, because it is my torture. Prresently, when that is finished, he comes to rruin me. They are not good, these boys: they are cruel. In *my* land the boys are not thus. But I do not attend him; I come first: I tell you that I strike him. I have finished."

The eruption ceased and he stood silent but smouldering, like a blown-out volcano.

The Head Master looked at him oddly—very much as Murray, just now, had looked at the Head Master.

“Monsieur Frapotel,” he said, trying not to speak too coldly, “I am going to astonish you. Murray’s father heard of your behaviour through a curious chance. He has been here to-day.” The French Master’s agitation visibly increased, and Mr. Sankey, not sparing him his lesson, with slow deliberation added: “He was very angry. He threatened to hand you over to the police.” Then, feeling that the time was ripe: “And in this very room, the boy whom you call ‘cruel’ and ‘not good,’ lied—lied to his father and to me—to save you. Monsieur Frapotel,” he ended gravely, “you assure me you have struck a boy in anger. Such a thing has been unknown at Cliborough, and I hope always will be. In this case the boy himself denies it. You must therefore be mistaken. Thank you.” He made a gesture of dismissal.

Monsieur Frapotel threw up his hands in disbelief. “But it is mad!” he muttered. “*Mad*, utter!”

X

“Murrhay,” said the French Master, after an hour’s quiet thought, “yesterday I strike you. Your father is very angry. Why not? He threaten the police. You say to yourself: ‘He is fierce, this monsieur; yes, he do me wrong; but my father will

ruin him.' You do not wish that. You are noble. You lie for me. I have understood. A thousand thanks." At the end of which well-rehearsed oration he grasped Ted Murray's hand with fervour.

That enterprising person had quite different ideas—nay, even plans.

"*Non moi!*" he replied, hurriedly dropping the hot hand that stood for peace without victory. "*Je n'ai du tout compris.*" And, rather embarrassed, he walked hurriedly away.

XI

That night Monsieur Frapotel found a bewildered-looking goat tethered to his bedstead.





MOST schools have this much in common with the great London clubs: each has its own special vanity. With a big Public School, in fact, it is often possible to say the same about each separate House. Sport naturally comes out an easy first in this, and—speaking quite generally—no School or House would ever admit, however difficult the facts, that any other was better than itself in games. Any House supper or School speech-day proves this to the hilt.

Even here, however, there are differences, with both Schools and Houses. One prides itself on being the great place for oars; another is a nursery for bats; a third, perhaps, has always had the best cross-country runners; a fourth has won the sports cup oftener than any other; there might even be a House that plumed itself upon Praepostors or Head Boys; and, if a great novelist may be believed, there

once existed a set of fellows so eccentric that they took their stand proudly upon the platform of not washing.

St. Stanton's, Ferncliff-upon-Sea, indulged in a hobby shared—it is said—by one of our very greatest Public Schools. From its Head Master downwards, all its members dearly loved a duke. If nobody of that high rank could be provided at the moment, they had perforce to pride themselves on a mere baronet or even on so low a person as an honourable. For the "son of a belted earl" life was indeed a bed of roses at St. Stanton's; but woe betide the miserable youth who owned as father even the most successful financier or tradesman. As to the "cook's son," famed in Kipling's poem, St. Stanton's had probably never even realized that such common people as confectioners indulged in a home life at all, or had any place in the world's scheme beyond providing the "upper classes" with the non-necessities of life.

St. Stanton's, in brief, was "select."

For this last word (extracted from the School prospectus), its rivals as a rule read "snobby."

* * * * *

Cecil Jubb was a very humble individual. Added to this, he was sprung from a father who thought hardly anything of our old aristocracy; and, in the third place, he was truthful.

Jubb, arriving as a new boy and coming at once under the highly superior scrutiny of these well-born Stantonites, astonished them all by denying almost indignantly that he was in any way

connected with the noble house which shares his name of Cecil.

"What made you think of such a rotten thing as that?" was his highly inappropriate remark.

"Rotten!" snorted Ponsonby. He was not actually connected with the titled gentry, but his father rented a house called Ponsonby Hall, and that address had given him some standing at St. Stanton's. "I should like to know what there is rotten about it. You'd better jolly well be careful or you'll get a bad time of it, I can tell you. You can't behave here like you did in the pigsty of a prep school that you came from. As a matter of fact, we've got two Cecils here and it's one of the best names in England."

"It's all right to be called by," answered Jubb, turning away and opening his play-box.

This lofty dismissal of so honourable and ancient a title made a considerable sensation among his audience.

"Look here," asked Vernon D'Arcy, "who *are* you?"

"Who?" It was Jubb's turn to appear surprised. He did not know the desolating sense in which select county people use this simple little word.

Vernon D'Arcy stared at him in pity. "Yes. If you aren't a Cecil, who in the name of goodness are you? Where do the Jubbs come from? Are they Jubbs of Norfolk, I mean, or of Cheshire, or of what? I don't believe there ever *was* a Jubb." This last, with a sniff, he delivered to the select company assembled in the Box Room after Prayers.

“Wasn’t there?” cried Jubb, with a new note of interest and almost of defiance. “Well, there jolly well was, then, because there was my father, see? And *I’m* a Jubb as well.”

“You look it,” put in Adlincourt, the funny man.

Ponsonby waved this aside as *infra dig.* in a discussion on such solemn subjects. “Well,” he enquired, “who was your father, then, if you prefer it put like that? And where did he come from?”

“My father, if you want to know,” began Jubb, amid general interest, “*was* a miner and he came from Mansfield. Now,” he went on, with a note of loving pride that showed him to be more sensible than the Stantonites around him, “he’s a director, and J.P., and been mayor, and we live out in Sherwood Forest. So now I hope you’re happy. Have an orange?”

* * * * *

The select young gentry of St. Stanton’s were not really happy. They admitted that Jubb’s appearance was not so bad as might have been expected, and that he knew how to eat decently and that he didn’t drop his h’s—but then, of course, his father probably had pots of tin and had been able to afford him, all his life, the very best of education. That, no doubt, was why the cad had now come to St. Stanton’s. . . .

Meanwhile, the only thing to do was—obviously—to make it quite clear that he was not wanted there.

This was done with a thoroughness that

convinced even Cecil Jubb, whose hide luckily was thicker than that of the usual Stantonite owing to a certain hardness of early training. The cold answers to his questions; the abrupt "No," which met his offered oranges or other foodstuffs; the chill that fell on any group at his approach—these things, quite apart from actual and not infrequent references to touts, bounders, or the great industry of mining, soon brought home even to him the fact that he was hardly popular. It was quite often pointed out to him that St. Stanton's was a very wondrous place, more splendid by far than any of the Public Schools, which were extremely jealous and therefore talked about it as a "prep place," even though it had eight boys eighteen years of age and had educated three dukes, two viscounts, and baronets beyond all counting. That any one named Jubb and claiming openly to be a miner's son should thrust himself among a set of boys all somehow connected with the highest and best circles was (he soon came to see) regarded as an insult to the whole "tone of the establishment," so frequently referred to in the vellum-bound Prospectus.

Of course even Stantonites are human, and if Jubb had continued to smile, to offer oranges, and above everything had been able to show some skill at games, no doubt he would soon have been accepted on equal terms by people who under all their snobbery (mainly encouraged by their Head) were only boys—natural, warm-hearted, friendly. But Jubb was not much good at games, nor did he possess the staying power required. His rugged, practical

father had taught him to bear pain, to endure hunger, to take a telling-off; he had never thought it necessary to harden him against snubs, insults, petty persecution. Now these things are harder to bear, because dirtier, than the others; and Jubb could not face the test. He offered his oranges and cake, warm-heartedly, for close upon a day; he smiled for nearly two; then he gave in, utterly discouraged, and after four happy years, popular and noisy, at his prep school, became a gloomy, silent, home-sick outcast among the select young gentlemen of that toney establishment, St. Stanton's.

II

Mrs. Jubb—a sensible woman, who had chosen an ideal husband at the risk of marrying somewhat below her station—immediately perceived from Cecil's letters that he was not happy. She resisted the first temptation to rush down to Ferncliff-upon-Sea and visit him, as likely to make him even more homesick when she left; but she added to the many debts he owed her by sending him countless papers or parcels, with letters referring to his many interests at home and promising all sorts of excursions and excitements in the coming holidays. She also cut from the papers any bit of reading matter, serious or comic, that possibly could interest him, and these she sent—with comments on the margin—in her letters, thinking quite rightly that they would further fill his time and occupy his thoughts.

This started all the trouble.

Cecil Jubb, on the third Monday of a sad first term, hungrily opened his home letter, read it through twice and then, settling in a quiet corner of his study, began to sift the cuttings, happily. One or two were jokes, which he would have liked to pass on if he had not been too sure of their icy reception; others concerned railway engines and dogs, two of his assorted passions; and three or four he put specially aside as bearing comments in his Mother's writing. Most of these were articles of some length upon various of his hobbies, but one was a quite short paragraph, obviously cut from a daily paper of the chatty-column class. This he naturally tackled first. It ran:

“IS HE YOUR SON'S FAG?”

“Considerable fluttering of scholastic doves will probably be caused by the Pallachian Prime Minister's somewhat indiscreet confession, at his Mansion House reception yesterday, that the Crown Prince of that country is at present being educated, incognito, at one of our West Coast educational establishments. We can imagine the pedagogues of that salubrious region anxiously scanning Smith Major or Jones Minimus to see if, under his commonplace name and regulation clothing, he conceals the hauteur and aloofness which may be expected in the Crown Prince of a country that, however small, is admittedly the most civilized and cultured of the smaller European states. The suburbs, too, will doubtless do their share of fluttering as Mrs.

Smith and Mrs. Jones imagines her son friendly with or even—highest glory!—fagging a real and live Heir Apparent. Truly romance is not dead, even in a West Coast school."

Mrs. Jubb, always anxious to amuse, and at her wits' end for any comment that could somehow connect each cutting with her son's interests, had written in the margin:

"I think the betting is in favour of St. Stanton's, but I don't somehow fancy he will be *your* fag!!!"

She did not feel that this was a specially bright effort, and she would therefore have been flattered if she had seen its effect on Cecil Jubb. The thought of how these Stantonites would revel in a prince tickled him more than the idea of having that great personage—or any other—as his fag. He looked around and saw their snobby faces in a new, more foolish, light. Silly asses, why had he cared so much what they thought of him? He read the paragraph again.

Imagine, if they had a prince, and only found out afterwards! "West Coast——"

Suddenly he laughed aloud.

Everybody turned.

Jubb, the sad, silent Jubb, bursting into laughter, all alone!

As a junior he shared his study with eight other boys, and at this hour—just after breakfast—all were in it, busy reading letters or preparing tardy construes for the Second School. Not one but swung

about and gazed in speechless wonder at this sudden marvel. Vaguely, every one felt it was somehow cheek but nobody was sure just how.

Ponsonby, the senior boy present and Study Monitor, broke this pained silence.

"Hullo, Brights," he said (some mining expert had found Jubbs that name). "Cheering up, are you? What's the joke?"

"It's private," answered Jubbs, and flushed at the general attention.

"They've struck gold in the coal-mine," Adlin-court suggested, "or possibly a pit pony has had puppies. Which is right?"

"Neither," said Jubbs, in the sharp, curt manner he had long since taken up towards the Stantonites.

"Well, anyhow," said Ponsonby, speaking with the official air of Study Monitor and making up his regulations as he went along, "if you laugh publicly over a joke, you've got to tell it publicly. So cough it out. Come on."

"I don't see why," came the defiant answer. "That's a rotten rule."

"Well, it's a rule," lied Ponsonby with stern complacency; "so just buck up and tell us."

"Probably," squeaked little Vere-Beste, always on the winning side, "it's just a Mansfield joke and we should never see it."

"As a matter of fact," said Jubbs, who had wisdom enough to know when to yield; "it's a London joke, and *you* will see it more than most." He got up, walked slowly across to Ponsonby's desk and threw the cutting down almost contemptuously.

"It's awfully aristocratic," he said, and so strolled right out of the room.

"I call it beastly cheek to all of us," urged Vere-Beste, as Ponsonby's scornful voice died down. "Why should the swine say *we* should see that more than most?"

There was no answer. Nobody ever took any notice of Vere-Beste. He was of the type known as "greaser," whose tragedy it is to be always pleasant—except, of course, to those who are unpopular—and never to please any one. All waited for Ponsonby's opinion.

"What puzzles me," began the Study Monitor, after some seconds of silence, sitting with a puckered brow, "is why it should amuse the blighter so." He read the paragraph again, but to himself this time.

Vere-Beste rushed in for another try. "Simply because he wanted to make himself offensive to us all."

"I don't see that he did," said Ponsonby. "Dry up, V.B. You're off it badly. Besides, why should he say *we'd* see it more than most? And what's this stuff about the betting being on St. Stanton's?"

"That's because we're known—well, you know what I mean!" Vere-Beste had begun with the oily intent of flattering Ponsonby by an allusion to the School's aristocratic nature; but even a Stantonite has limits. Also, he was not quite sure whether anybody knew that his parents went about Balham by the plain name of Bests.

"No," mused the great Ponsonby, with slow

deliberation; "I don't see, quite. There's something odd about the whole affair," and he read out again: "'but I don't somehow fancy he will be *your* fag,' and that's got three of those marks women use put after it—three! So some one else besides young Jubb could see the richness of the joke. I jolly well wish *I* could."

"*I* can," suddenly shouted Sacheverell, with all the abrupt energy of a man anxious to be first.

Everybody yelled out something—"What is it?" "Why, what?" and so forth; but Sacheverell, having staked his claim for first speech, relapsed in an irritating manner into the usual moody silence that suited his bookish and retiring nature.

"Come along," urged Ponsonby. "Let's hear it, then."

"Hush!" said Adlincourt. "He's thinking. Can't you see he's busy?" Whereat he scored a bull's-eye with his Cicero upon the thinker's head.

"Well," slowly began Sacheverell, so roused, "don't you see?"

"Of course we don't," Ponsonby yelled, furious, "and School is in four minutes."

"Well," went on the other, with a sudden sprint, "the Crown Prince of Whatyoucallem is fagging at a West Coast school under an ordinary name and Jubb's mother or whatever she is says he's probably a Stantonite but doesn't think he can be *Jubb's* fag and that amuses Jubb because he jolly well knows naturally that he is the Crown Prince himself."

The breathless story ended. A stunned silence

took its place. It was almost a pity that Jubb had not stayed to see.

Suddenly the School bell clanged the call to Second Hour.

III

Work is never at its best on Monday; but seldom, even on the week's first day, can it have been so

*He scored a bull's-eye
upon the Thinker's head*



desperately bad as in this Second Hour—so far, that is, as the eight occupants of study number sixteen were concerned. Not one of them had any thought beyond Pallachia and Jubb. Punishments and threats rolled off their heads unheeded. With every moment of this interminable period a fresh fact emerged that lent new colour to Sacheverell's ingenious discovery.

Jubb's amazing contempt for ducal families and noble names now stood out, especially, in a fresh light. It was, of course, the clearest proof that he was of superior birth to dukes, if only they had not been blind. Now—with their eyes opened by Sacheverell—they saw in a fresh light Jubb's ridiculous name as a delicious bit of irony; they realized that nobody who was what he had claimed to be could ever have possessed such manners; they understood his solitary nature and the scorn—puzzling until now—with which he had of late clearly regarded them.

Eight faces flushed, as the sharers of his study realized what the Crown Prince must have thought of them and their downright refusal of the oranges and other gifts proffered so graciously—at first—to them.

How well, on the whole, he had taken it—with what a courtly dignity! How long he had persevered with his offers of oranges and cake! How cold and haughty he had been throughout!

He was, they saw now, so hopelessly unlike a common person in looks, manner, habits, that—but for his perfect English—they ought surely to have guessed. And as to that, a foreign prince, of course, had tutors for each language from the earliest days and always spoke all perfectly.

As the clock struck the longed-for hour of release they surged back to the study with a strong feeling of remorse and quite a new friendliness for the self-styled C. Jubb.

IV

"What on earth," asked Jubb indignantly, "put such a rotten idea as that into your heads?"

The proud co-sharers of his study recognized, almost with love, his formula of the first day of term. This time, Ponsonby did not protest at the word "rotten."

"No, Jubb," he smiled, indulgently, with a fond emphasis on the ridiculous false name; "the game's up, and you know it, too; so just confess and smile! We swear we won't give you away. It's just a study secret, see?"

"Oh, it's a *game*, is it?" asked Jubb, with all of his old coldness. "I thought perhaps you'd all gone off your nut."

And with that he strolled slowly—as before—out of the room. Nobody liked to stop him. Vere-Beste made a movement as if to open the door; then drew back and blushed.

"Doesn't seem very bucked," began Adlincourt, "to be acquitted of being an outsider!"

"Because that's probably what he thinks us," said Ponsonby, with a wisdom suddenly beyond his years.

"But he's so jolly cold about it," went on Adlincourt. "Doesn't seem to mind much either way."

Ponsonby took up the newspaper cutting. "Hauteur and aloofness," he read out.

"What's hauteur?" piped Vere-Beste.

"The French for swank," said Adlincourt, "or anyhow the journalese."

V

Jubb's first feeling was one of contemptuous amusement. He could hardly fail to notice the changed attitude of his eight study companions toward him and he observed with amazement—like many better men before him—the depths of foolishness to which snobbery can lead its victims. Even if he had actually been the rotten old Crown Prince, he told himself, it would have been funny enough. As it was, he saw the joke increasingly each hour.

The heat of his original denial had been genuine, forced out of him by honest anger at the Stantonites' absurdity. When, however, he found that the more furiously he denied the story, the more stoutly they believed it true, he began to get what added fun he could from his position by purposely overdoing the indignation with which he received their accusations.

"Crown Prince, indeed!" he would retort. "Why should you suddenly say I am that, of everything? You used to say I was a crossing-sweep or something. Not sure that's not better than a silly ass of a Crown Prince. For heaven's sake do drop it and find something fresh!"

These speeches were repeated as a final proof that Jubb most certainly was Heir Apparent to Pallachia. Who else would be—could be—offended at the accusation? Most fellows, even if it was untrue, would be hugely flattered. But, of course, as he *was* the Crown Prince, he had to deny it and

was hideously fed, because if it got known, he'd probably get sent away from St. Stanton's (imagine the disaster!), because the whole idea had been for him to be treated as an ordinary boy, with no one knowing who he was. Wonderful phrases like "political considerations" and "international complications" began to buzz about the School.

Meanwhile Jubb came slowly to see that there were advantages in being taken for a prince.

Vernon D'Arcy, for instance, had never seemed to be even a distant acquaintance, much less a friend or intimate; and yet, happening to find himself Jubb's neighbour at the School-shop counter late that afternoon, he turned round pleasantly and smiled at him in genial recognition.

"Have a ginger-beer and queen-cake with me?" he said, in the friendliest way possible.

Jubb's first instinct was to refuse this offer, rather too reminiscent of treating in a public-house, from a fellow he had little cause to love. The last two weeks, however, had been miserable, lonely, and he lacked the courage to snub such friendly advances.

"If you really mean me," he answered, with equal geniality, "and don't imagine you're talking to the Shah or some one!"

"No," Vernon D'Arcy answered, but with something near a wink. "I meant the offer for C. Jubb of Mansfield! I'm afraid, you know, we've been rather cads to you and you've taken it all jolly well."

"Not a bit," stammered Jubb, blushing. "And

thanks." He bit well into the queen-cake in case he woke up.

This was all right, with a vengeance. D'Arcy wanted to be friendly; offered him grub; apologized; and swore it was all meant for him, not for His Pallachian Majesty! What could be better?

He enjoyed the food and chatted merrily to Vernon D'Arcy, who on acquaintance proved to be a very decent fellow. They had quite a jolly chat. Presently the great Ponsonby strolled up; smacked the one-time outcast Jubb upon the back; bought some chocolate and offered him a slab; then joined, full of laughter, in the conversation.

All this much surprised the remainder of the School, who had always regarded Jubb as about the most impossible thing yet born.

When Vernon D'Arcy and Jubb had wandered away arm-in-arm, still joking, De Vericourt, resplendent in the tasselled football cap, came slowly up to Ponsonby, who in a moment seemed curiously small and insignificant.

"I say, Ponsonby," the First Eleven man enquired, "what's all this sudden slobbering over young Jubb? I thought he was supposed to be a stinker, who oughtn't ever to be sent here?"

"Yes, but we made a sort of mistake," said Ponsonby, with something curiously like a blush.

"Sort of? I should say so!" the other laughed a little bitterly. "And what's more, you seem to have spotted it extraordinarily suddenly."

"Ye—es," said Ponsonby, more and more embarrassed, trying to gain time. Then, with a quick



"They had quite
a jolly chat"

resolve to clear himself at any cost, he added in a lower tone: "I think, De Vericourt, if you'd come away from all this ram, I could explain a bit."

De Vericourt showed some surprise but said, "Very well," and moved towards the door. They went out together—another unaccustomed couple—followed by many curious eyes. What *could* be happening?

Those who know how mysteriously rumour spreads in any school will hardly be surprised to hear that, before evening Prayers on the same day, every Stantonite had heard that they had a Crown Prince among them in the School, but it was—ssh!—a really *deadly* secret. Don't tell *any* one.

Jubb, tremendously amused and happy for the first time since he left his home, could almost see the news spread by noting the time at which any given fellow's attitude to him underwent a sudden transformation.

Next morning—it was quite clear—his Form Master knew. And Jubb, realizing where his strength lay, continued more strongly to deny the story and to accept with almost royal graciousness all offerings of oranges or cake.

* * * * *

It is generally some foolish little thing that spoils the big delights of life.

The foolish little thing, in the case of Jubb's permanent picnic, was Vere-Beste. That soapy young gentleman was in the habit of passing the long winter evenings by poring over such biographies of great—and particularly titled—people as the library

contained. Engaged in this hobby, on the fifth day after Jubb's unveiling as Crown Prince, he suddenly came upon this passage in the life of a famous old Etonian :

“ Incidentally he is perhaps one of the few living people who can boast that they have kicked a king. Let it be understood that this occurred before that king was on the throne, and in the happy days when, as Crown Prince, he was a careless new boy at the historic Thames-side school. The episode occurred this way——”

That was enough for Vere-Beste; too much for poor Jubb. Vere-Beste was resolved that, let who might come after, *he* would earn undying distinction and a place in future biography by being the first, anyhow, to kick this king.

He hastily put back the volume in its place, left the library, went out upon the football field, found Jubb and planted on the usual spot a very creditable kick.

Jubb swung about. “ What's that for? ” he asked angrily.

“ Don't forget *I* was the first to do it,” answered Vere-Beste. He had the smug, contented air of one who has carried out faithfully a solemn ritual.

“ I won't,” said Jubb, rubbing the place; “ and I hope you're the last as well.”

This proved optimistic. Vere-Beste never sinned upon the side of silence, and in this case he let everybody know almost at once that he was the

original and only first Stantonite to kick a future king.

Naturally the boast had a colossal effect upon his fellow-pupils at the select and snobby educational



"What's that for?"
he asked, angrily.

establishment of Ferncliffe-upon-Sea. Much jealousy was felt and envy of Vere-Beste because of his undoubted lead. A few weak copyists went out and landed hacks on various portions of poor Jubb, crying out "second," "third," or "fourth." Their claims were not by any means all accurate, but he

did not correct them. Most of the others realized, however, that even to be second is a feeble fate. They set themselves to think out experiments in which they would be undisputed first.

Ponsonby, for instance, was early in the field with a shrewd punch upon Jubb's nose.

"I was the first to punch your nose," he said, almost defiantly, but then—like all the others—became friendliness its very self again. He did not, however, show any sign of interference when Brabazon came up and lifted Jubb an inch by his left ear.

Jubb himself scarcely knew what line to take. His instinct was to fight; but everybody hit or tortured him in so genial a way that such retaliation seemed a little bit unfriendly. He did nothing, and thus the notion got about that the Crown Prince did not at all object.

Jubb, however, objected very strongly; and having asked fellows to stop, began to consider—when a second round (so to speak) started—how he could stop the nuisance. It was not so bad that each fellow should have assaulted him in some way once, but when they wanted to stake a second claim, he struck.

As to the manner of his striking, let it be remembered that he was only thirteen and a half; also that men of thirty sometimes make mistakes. Jubb, failing to stop the painful nuisance by his own unaided efforts, went to the Head Master and asked abruptly whether he would stop the fellows treating him as a Crown Prince.

"As *what*?" almost shouted Dr. Fenton.

"Kicking me," put in Jubb, as explanation.

The Head put on his spectacles. "Be more lucid, Jubb," he said severely. "Why Crown Prince, and what connection has it got with kicking? People do not kick Crown Princes." He suspected this boy of a rag.

Jubb was as lucid as possible in his attempt to make it clear how Crown Princes and kicking had been quite closely connected. He told the whole story.

Dr. Fenton, alone of all at St. Stanton's, had never heard of the affair. He seldom heard of anything. It was his boast to be away from and above the petty details of school life. "Don't talk to *me* of such trivial affairs," he would say loftily to masters who brought matters up to him. "Deal with them; that's what you're here for. I am a busy man. I sit here and am the centre of everything; I *am* the School, the great School of St. Stanton's. How can I concern myself with Croft Minor individually? You will be reporting to me next that the junior table was one egg-cup short at breakfast! Deal with it, my dear man; deal with it," and he would wave them away. Soon, naturally, they ceased to come. Dr. Fenton was left sitting; free to concentrate on parents—particularly those with titles. . . .

To this story, however, he listened with the most flattering attention. At its end, he did not wave C. Jubb away. He sat silent for more than a minute, fingering his paper-knife and thinking; then

suddenly shot out a question. This was his speciality upon the rare occasions when he condescended to investigate a row.

"And why, Jubb," he flashed out, "do they call you a Crown Prince?" He glared at him fiercely.

"Because of the cutting," said Jubb, duly nervous. He threw in a late, "sir." Frankly, he had looked for far more sympathy.

"But why *you*?" went on Dr. Fenton, yet more sternly. "Why not Brown Minimus? Why not De Vericourt? Why *you*? Why did they start? Why did they go on?"

"I don't know, sir," stammered Jubb. It seemed ridiculous, as he had come to complain about the matter, to say that he had at first tried to encourage them by overdoing his denials.

Dr. Fenton stared at him from under great dark bushy eyebrows, more like other men's moustaches.

"There is no smoke, Jubb," he said, slowly, impressively, but with far more geniality of tone, "without a fire. I am glad you have come to me.

This practice of kicking you must cease at once. Please tell me at any time of anything else that would make your stay amongst us a more pleasant memory in years to come. I intend to say no more. I understand your situation well, having had some experience in the Courts of Europe. I congratulate you on having acted with discretion and as your father and those around him certainly would wish. We here shall all respect those wishes, and feel proud to do so. Thank you, 'Jubb.'"

He smiled pleasantly, laying a slight irony upon

the name, and followed with something like fondness in his eyes the slim, well-built figure of this boy, whose presence lent new lustre even to St. Stanton's.

At the half-term concert, Dr. Fenton whispered a great deal to parents, and frequently patted Jubb upon the shoulders.

"Such a modest little chap,"
he would murmur.



"Such a modest little chap," he would murmur, as Jubb hastily escaped once more. "So loyal, too. Denies it, even to myself! Of course, he *has* to. All splendidly arranged; a 'father' in the Midlands, with a supposititious name and so forth! Great credit to our Foreign Office. But, of course, we *here* are well used to these little comedies."

And his delighted smile was topped by something curiously like a wink.

* * * * *

Jubb's life from this day became a far more pleasant thing. Endless little favours were shown him by the Head Master, who also—by making one example—finally stopped the painful habit of collecting biographic souvenirs upon Jubb's person. Every one was pleasant, and no one ever mentioned why. He was invariably known as "Jubb." Things settled down until he almost forgot the reason for his popularity, fully contented to enjoy it without question. The boys, on their part, honestly liked Jubb, absolutely irrespective of the fact that by his presence he was giving them and their School lifelong honour.

There really seemed no reason why Jubb and all the Stantonites should not continue to live happily in their secret delusion.

This, unluckily, was not to be.

The School Librarian, as keen as any one upon the honour shown to them, had run to ground the paper from which had come the cutting that revealed Jubb's secret; and now it was sent daily to the Reading Room, with some more reputable dailies, in hopes that one day it might give an even clearer hint as to the school that the Crown Prince had honoured.

And this, in fact, it one day did. The new paragraph ran thus:

"WAS HE YOUR SON'S FAG?"

“ Readers may remember a paragraph, some weeks ago, wherein we called attention to the romantic possibilities in the idea of an actual Crown Prince being educated, utterly unknown to the boys, in an English school. Now that he has unfortunately had to be sent back to the balmy climate of Pallachia for health reasons, the need for secrecy has ceased and we are able to announce that the school so highly honoured was the Weart School, Ramsgate, already the cradle of so many world-famed personages and peers. We do not doubt that this information, which we are enabled to afford exclusively, will interest innumerable readers.”

It certainly interested everybody at St. Stanton's, not excluding even the Head Master, who for once was hurriedly informed.

And all agreed also in feeling furious.

Jubb had humiliated them. So much was obviously clear. By his ridiculous deception he had made a laughing-stock of them and of St. Stanton's. Parents had been told, presents had been showered on him, and he had let the thing go on. He had behaved abominably.

All were like one man in yet another thing—all told Jubb what they thought of him.

Jubb, however, it must be regretfully set down, showed no penitence at all. His reply to the Head Master's severe and almost violent lecture may be taken as typical of all.

“ Please, sir,” he modestly replied, “ I always *said* I wasn't the Crown Prince. You all said I

was, but I knew that I wasn't, sir, and everybody kicked me, though, of course, the cake was all right, and I always *said* I wasn't. So really it's you, sir, who were wrong and I'm right after all ! ”

* * * * *

Jubb easily might have become unpopular over this episode. Luckily, however, the logic of his answer appealed to every one, and as the Stantonites had long since proved him to be a good friend and an amusing companion, they soon forgave him—the more readily because, deep down, most of them felt that they had made averagely full-sized idiots of themselves.

In fact, from this time dates the decay of snobbery among the Stantonites. They decided to adopt another hobby. Any one who mentions descent or ancestry is now set down as a little bit of an outsider, and St. Stanton's special vanity just now rests on the claim that it produces county cricketers.





The LAST CHANCE



OW listen to *me*, Bird," said the Head Master, most impressively.

Bird, of course, was listening already.

Whatever might be the fate of some of the new Head's rules, there was no doubt that he himself could always be sure of the utmost attention. Jack Bird stood very respectfully before the massive desk; his hands dropped in an attitude of almost military correctness, his whole bearing one of the most respectful humility. Everything about him seemed to show obedience and contrition—except his thoughts: and these luckily are not visible, even to the most far-seeing of Head Masters.

Mr. Codrington (who was always rather quick to anger, but never more so than when addressed as "Doctor" Codrington) paused effectively. He was determined above everything to be impressive.

In his short reign of two terms as Sherborough's Head Master, he had already had some half-dozen interviews with this same Bird: two of which had ended in a flogging. Now this last, at Sherborough as at most Public Schools, is a solemn affair; something held over offenders as an awful possibility; a sword above their heads, and one certain to fall if they do not soon see the error of their ways. In fact, Mr. Codrington since his accession had only carried out that final threat upon four boys, of whom (as an Irishman might put it) two had been Bird. And now he thoroughly deserved to be the fifth! At this rate, clearly, a flogging from the Head would soon lose its mysterious terror and thus its power as a deterrent. Every one knew, of course, that the birch as wielded by the Head hurt far less than, for instance, the Praepostor's cane, but its sting—so to speak—had lain in the indignity, so that a threat of being reported to the Head Master had been effectual for generations. Well, now Bird had twice suffered the "indignity," and was so far bearing up under it that with a light heart he had already qualified for a third application!

Mr. Codrington, then, was resolved on this occasion to be above all things impressive. Further repetition of a punishment proved useless would be stupid, and yet he had no wish in the world to adopt with this boy the one course more extreme—expulsion. After all, none of his offences showed a vicious nature or one in any way dangerous to his fellows. In fact, none of them showed anything

except a boyish spirit, an inventive mind and a health too exuberant for rules.

No : he would frighten the boy, and effectively. He cleared his throat. Jack Bird, scenting a danger signal, cleverly drooped his head a few inches lower, into a yet more convincing posture of Remorse.

"Since I became Head Master of this School," began Mr. Codrington, deliberately slow, "I have had occasion, I am glad to say, to speak seriously about breaches of discipline to a few only of the boys."

Here he paused so long that one might really have been excused for thinking that he had shut up business for the day. Jack, however, of long experience, knew that this could not be so, and stood motionless, submissive, dumb. He did not think he need congratulate.

Suddenly the Head, who had been almost lying back in the big chair, peering at his victim, shot out towards him like some vicious snake.

"Of those few," he said quickly, "you are the only one who has made two appearances : and you, Bird, have made considerably *more* than two."

"Yes, sir," answered Jack, in the abject tones of one who has only just realized the full depth of his iniquity.

Mr. Codrington, to judge by his appearance, was in doubt. He sat thinking deeply, while Jack watched him with a growing apprehension. The silence in this dim-lit panelled room, with its old book-shelves and slow-ticking clock, began to be a torture.

Those other visits had been so different : that was what alarmed him now. Then, after a brief accusation, the Head had leapt up in what seemed a gust of assumed indignation, crying : “ I shall *flog* you,” and almost in one breath, “ down with your breeches, sir,” for such was the formula, as dignified as it was crude, that had come down the centuries at Sherborough.

And this time there seemed not a sign of anger. “ Old ” Codrington (who, by the way, was not yet thirty-five) looked worried, sad—responsible.

Then it was, with this thought, that the real dread settled on Jack Bird. He saw it all now. . . . Those larks had been such fun : the two birchings had been nothing in comparison : he had not ever thought that the Head would look upon him as incurable, never imagined that any other punishment could fall upon him. . . .

And Mr. Codrington sat silent, obviously thinking and in doubt. Yes, he would frighten him, this time. . . .

How should he tell his people? That was what hurt Jack the most. He knew they were so proud of him. Of course the pater had thought it awful fun when he said that he had been swished, but now—“ Out of hand ”—“ incorrigible ”—“ school discipline ”—hadn’t he heard it all from Codrington and been amused? Now, it would be written upon paper; sent home, sent—with him !

He had forgotten to act, long ago. All his old tricks of attitude, which he had always found such a success with masters, had yielded to reality. Pale

and in an agony of nervousness, he waited what seemed half-an-hour for the decision of this man in whose hands his whole future lay; this man from whose verdict he knew there could be no appeal.

Mr. Codrington, unseen, glanced up at him, and saw that the punishment was over, the impression made. Bird would go away and think.

"I shall *not* expel you," he said so abruptly that Jack started and, overcome with the reaction, found himself, with tears in his eyes, clutching dizzily at the desk for needed support. "I have decided to give you one more chance—the last."

"Oh, thank you, sir," exclaimed Jack, and no one ever said anything with more sincerity.

The Head Master held up a stiff hand, as if to discourage anything like sentiment. "But understand, Bird," he said very sternly, "it *will* be only one more. These constant breaches of school discipline, however trivial when considered individually—and I admit freely that there is no vice in any of them—become quite fatal to the continuance of a school as such. The boy who pays no heed to rules or punishments must obviously be removed. You yourself, Bird, as a boy of, I suppose, some seventeen years——"

"*Sixteen*, sir," said Jack, quite hopefully.

"Very well then," continued the other, as though that wash-out proved his point, "you surely must see that the position is impossible."

"Yes, sir." Jack would have said that to almost anything just now.

"Understand, then," slowly remarked the Head once more, "that if—for *any* reason"—and he raised his finger—"you are sent to my study again during the present term by any of the staff, I shall be compelled to take the course that I ought probably to have adopted now and expel you from the School." Then, in solemn and effective tones he said: "Your next visit here this term will be your last; do you see?"

"Yes, sir," once again.

"Very well, then. You can go."

"Thank you, sir," said the now genuinely abject Jack.

As the door closed, Mr. Codrington's thin lips, grimly pressed till now, parted slightly in a smile, half relief and half amusement. Then, well content with this policy in a dilemma, he went back to his correspondence.

II

"Phew!" whistled Jack, bursting into his study with all the relieved light-heartedness of a puppy that has just survived its bath. He flung himself upon a chair and tapped his heels on the oil-cloth as though to work off the last memories of an unpleasant scene.

The look of anxiety cleared from the faces of Bell and Edwards, who ever since the end of Second Hour had been awaiting their friend's return with some amount of nervousness. Jack always took his own perils more lightly than anybody else. It was

a distinct relief to see the old fool acting in this silly overdone way, with a rueful smile upon his face. This was not the manner, they decided, of a fellow who had got the sack—and yet his way of dropping on his chair was equally not that of one who had just had a swishing.

“ Well? ” asked one of them, and “ What happened? ” the other: but they spoke together, with an equal eagerness.

“ I have no vice,” said Jack, some way after the Head Master, “ but I am fatal to the continuance of the School as such,” and he smiled happily. A wiser and older Head Master would probably have taken care that Bird should be given a quiet hour or two, alone in a form room, wherein to moralize upon his close escape. Already, back here safely with his pals, Jack felt as though those minutes of terror were a mere long-distant nightmare; a memory at which he could now afford to laugh.

The others did not understand. What they heard of Codrington’s remarks did not sound healthy. But surely this amused-looking Jack could not have just come from hearing the sentence of expulsion? You never could be sure—with him.

“ But I say——” began Edwards, with impatience.

“ I shall *not* expel you,” Jack went on, deliberately: and without knowing it, both the others gave a small sigh of relief.

Abandoning his selections from the Head’s oration, Jack suddenly leapt up from his chair and threw a book with splendid aim at Bell.

“ Great strength rings the Bell,” he laughed: and

then, dealing out something very like a kidney punch to the bewildered Edwards: "Buck up, you two! Don't look as though I was a ghost back from the other world! Why, I'm not going even to be swished! So chuck it up!"



This he proceeded to do rather literally with the aid of a tin of biscuits that belonged to Edwards. Unluckily, it turned whilst in the air and though he caught it neatly by its two sides, the lid came off and quite a quantity of Best Assorted fell upon the floor.

"Oh, sorry!" he remarked slowly in an off-hand manner.

It was no use, they knew, arguing with Jack in such a mood. The chief point was that he had by some miracle escaped both swishing and the sack. When he wanted to tell them more, he would do so: and till then he would only rag. So that they followed his example in kneeling on the floor, and picked up the biscuits with the addition of as little dirt as possible. Best Assortedds around mid-term are not to be lightly squandered.

"All the same," said Jack in a contemplative manner, munching a biscuit shaped like a nut that seemed too good to be put back into the tin, "it's rather a bad business. How on earth does he expect me to keep from being reported to him till the end of term?"

"Is *that* what you've got to do?" asked Edwards. He had not expected to find out so soon.

Jack, who had just discovered a macaroon almost under the hot-water pipes, made a curious sound and nodded "Yes."

"Well, after all, that's not so difficult," said Bell.

"It mayn't be for you," Jack answered, having somehow got rid of the macaroon; "but there are six weeks more of term." He obviously had a grievance. "And if I'm reported—if I go there for any rotten thing, however small," he added sulkily, "I get the ancient and royal order of the sack. Rotten trick, I call it." He had quite forgotten his late gratitude to the Head Master.

"Just *like* old Fish-Face," Edwards backed him up by saying.

Mr. Codrington, coming to Sherborough as Head Master exceptionally young, was not very popular as yet. The very fact that he was so near in age to all the boys, and thus could understand their point of view so well, made him feel that he must either be severe or lose his dignity and influence. The boys had some justice in saying that, except to the very biggest fellows, he was even more stand-offish and pompous than the Head before him, who had been twice his age and size.

The three inhabitants of study number five in Weston's House spent some minutes pleasantly on this wildly popular topic of the equally unpopular new Head: but soon Bell, resolved that the laugh should not be all upon Jack's side, pretended that he saw something intensely humorous about the situation.

"Six weeks of being a good little boy!" he mocked.

Edwards was very quick to enter into the thing's spirit. "You'll be able to write a book of your experiences," he put in.

"No more mice in old Gorst's desk!" exulted Bell.

"No more Eno in Weston's Grape Nuts!" added the feebly imitative Edwards.

"No more putting the School clock back!" came from Bell.

Jack got up almost angrily. "I dare say it's very funny to you," he said, obviously worried,

" but it's jolly serious to me. I don't see how I'm going to do it, yet I can't be sacked."

He stood by the window, his brow furrowed as though what he had to " do " were some problem almost beyond solution instead of merely calling for obedience to simple rules handsomely framed and conveniently hung up in the study-passage.

" You'll *have* to be a good little boy, that's all ! " said the cruel Bell.

Jack was properly indignant. " No, I'm hanged if I do," he said with more heat than grammar. " It doesn't matter a bit about rotten little rules. But what I *will* do," and suddenly he became serious again, " is to take jolly good care that I don't do anything which lets me in for being reported to the Cod."

With which noble resolve he turned the conversation into other channels.

III

It would be pleasant to be able to declare that Jack's unusually early departure for Third Hour, or afternoon school, on this fateful day was due to his good resolutions.

Unluckily the facts are quite against that statement.

Third Hour starts at two-thirty. At two o'clock, then, he took up his construe to prepare for it and at two-tèn he threw it down.

" I'm sick of this," he said; " let's have a stroll."

Edwards was dubious. " You don't want to get

sent down and have another punishment already, you know," he said in mild discouragement.

"Drivel, man!" cried Jack, not in the least impressed. "*That* makes no difference. You don't suppose I'm going to be a little cherub all the term and not get any punishments at all, do you?"

Edwards did not and said so, forcefully.

"Very well, then!" argued Jack. "Don't talk such drivel any more. All I've got to do is to avoid being sent up to old Fish-Face. I needn't worry not to be 'sent down.'" With which feeble pun he slammed his Ovid, and said firmly: "Now then, come along and we'll rout the old Tinkler out."

Bell, to whom this referred, was in another Form; so did not make a member of their construe party. He, however, proved to be no less sick of his own job and the day was divine. They strolled out idly, arm-in-arm, along the central avenue that leads down to the old School buildings.

It was certainly splendid to be lounging along in the warm sunlight with one's best friends beside one, and Third School seemed a wicked institution. It was the sort of day that only England can provide. None of your Indian glare or your Italian limpness, but a good, clear, healthy sun that shone upon trees decked in all the green glory of the summer. Under them, out on the School field against the hedges in the distance, there sprawled groups of boys, honestly convinced that they were learning their construe. Nearer still—as if to provide a central figure for what was in fact a splendid landscape—Mr. Weston's little son was happily flying a kite. Not for him,



They strolled out idly,
arm in arm.

yet, on such an afternoon, was the cruel discipline that forced him to an airless form room. Full of the joy of life, blissful in freedom until bed-time, he leaped with a light heart as he pulled gently at the string that bound him with his high-flown, lazy-looking kite.

"Silly little fool!" exclaimed Jack, in a nasty spirit of pure jealousy. But he could not help raising his eyes to watch the little white object that dipped so idly like a yacht on some blue summer's ocean.

Bell tugged at the laggard's arm. "You seem to find his toy quite interesting, all the same!" he jeered. "Would ums like Daddy to give ums one for ums self?" His tongue, at moments, was a little brutal.

Jack was not quite old enough to care about being chaffed for an interest in childish things. "It'd make a jolly good target for a shot," he said, as though to explain why he had looked so long at this plaything of the "silly little fool." He loosed his arm for a moment and picked up a stone, to illustrate his point and also to hide a blush that he could not repress.

"Why, my good ass," said Bell, who was always rather superior, in patronizing tones, "you don't really imagine you could hit that kite? Distances in the air are jolly hard to calculate. That's hundreds of yards up!"

"Then see me bring it down," cried Jack, glad of a diversion; and he put himself in the attitude to throw.

“ Oh, I say, look out ! ” exclaimed the nervous Edwards. He felt sure that Jack, always in trouble, would find himself in the Head’s study all right before many days were past. Then he would be expelled. Jack expelled ! . . . Edwards could scarcely imagine Sherborough without him. No, at all costs Jack must be shadowed and kept out of rows until the end of term. Yet here—two hours after the Head’s solemn warning—here he was buzzing stones up at young Weston’s precious kite ! What if Bell were wrong, and Jack should really hit it ? . . . Awful visions surged across the mind of poor distracted Edwards. He saw the maimed toy fluttering like a winged pheasant to the ground ; saw the silly little fool, its owner, snivelling his way to Daddy ; saw Daddy’s righteously indignant scene with the wrecker of his dear son’s joy ; saw Jack entering the fatal and forbidden study ; saw him driving off to catch the train from Sherborough—for ever !

Inspired by anxiety about his headstrong friend, Edwards (who yet had no imagination when it came to Essays) saw all this, but there was not the time to pass it on and Jack showed not a sign of heeding that vague warning to look out.

No, action was essential.

With a decision quite new in his generally faltering nature, Edwards leapt forward and seized hold of his friend’s forearm just as the stone left his fingers.

The kite was saved ! Young Weston, totally unconscious of his risks, skipped gaily and pulled gently at the string.

Often, however, one must suffer for another's safety and so it was here.

The stone, dragged to a downward course by Edwards' firm pull, flew out at a low tangent and winged its rapid way unerringly towards one of those lamp-posts that adorn the School's main avenue. It was the lamp that suffered.

Ping! then clatter, clatter!—that was the first the three friends knew of it.

“Hullo!” cried Bell, surprised.

Jack was more practical. “Straight on!” he said. “Don't look as though it was us. I'll pay the carpenter its price.”

Distinctly, however, his luck was right out to-day, for even as he finished this remark and they turned the corner that the drive takes round the new library, a figure came upon them. It was Mr. Barnes of the Remove and he was smiling amiably—a sign of danger in this most unpopular of masters.

“What was that curious, yet familiar, sound which struck my ears?” he asked in a high voice and the famous manner which made boys call him a “sarcastic swine.”

“The quarter striking, sir?” asked Bell calmly. Mr. Barnes had always a bad effect on him.

“No-o, Bell,” answered the master, with mock seriousness. “I do not think it was the quarter striking. No, the sound to me was more like that made by the shattering of glass. Ah!” (here he pretended to be much surprised by what his quick eyes had not failed to see at once). “Oddly enough my hypothesis seems to be supported by the con-

dition of that lamp there. Do you see, Bell, the precise lamp to which I refer?" He spoke very pleasantly by now.

"What was that curious,
yet familiar, sound?"



"Yes, sir," answered Bell, furious within. Any other master would have simply asked who threw the stone, but Barnes was like a cat delighted to have got a mouse and fully resolved to make the most of it.

"I wonder, now, whether I should be any less

happily inspired if I suggested that—well, shall we say—BIRD threw the stone that caused both that breakage and that noise? Eh, Bird? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ I *am* less happily inspired? ”

“ I threw the stone,” Jack answered shortly. He, too, had not much patience with Barnes. But no Sherburian had.

“ Then I think we may sum up this whole interesting matter by saying that Bird pays the carpenter the cost of a new pane of glass and *also* writes me four Pœnas before Wednesday’s First Hour for throwing stones on the School site? ”

“ Very well, sir.”

Barnes, more genial than ever, strode away and Jack put out his tongue at him in a safe, prudent manner.

“ Sorry,” said Edwards. “ My fault! I wish I wrote more like you! ”

“ Rot, man! What are four Pœnas? Just one hundred paltry lines! I’ll do them on my head.”

“ But after what the Fish-Face——”

Jack seemed almost angry. “ Oh, you and your Fish-Face! If I’m not even to buzz stones about, I’d rather take the sack at once. Don’t worry me! I’ve not been sent up to the Head *yet*, have I? ”

Poor Edwards shrugged his shoulders hopelessly.

IV

Bell was in study number five, getting out his pads just after Third Hour, when suddenly Jack

almost staggered in. His friend had never seen him look so serious.

"I say, what's up?" he cried. "Got sent down in Third Hour? . . . You're *not* reported to the Head?"

Jack tried to laugh. "Sent down in Third Hour? No, rather not. In fact I wrote a letter. But I've only just realized—it *is* a bit awkward——"

"What? Buck up, man! What?"

"I've only got one more Pœna paper to my name and if I ask Wise for four he'll naturally send me to the Head, and then——"

"I *say*!" Bell gasped, and well he might. The situation was extremely serious.

Pœnas are the usual punishment for senior boys at Sherborough and are the same as "lines" at any other school, with one small difference. When a boy has been given Pœnas, he must go to Mr. Wise, the Punishment Master, and ask for the required number of Pœna papers upon which to write. Each sheet (holding twenty-five lines) is inscribed by that master with the culprit's name, so that Pœna papers are, like railway tickets, "not transferable."

The object of this curious restriction is this. Till it was introduced by Mr. Codrington, Pœnas had been things that one received and wrote. The more one received—well, the more one wrote. There was no limit to the quantity.

The new Head Master had not cared for this generosity. A boy, he felt, who specialized in Pœnas and wrote a few daily, wanted pulling up. During this last term, therefore, the new idea had

been enforced. Thirty-six sheets was now the limit of a boy's terminal allowance. So soon as Mr. Wise had ticked off that number as supplied, he would report the boy to Mr. Codrington. Nobody, as yet, in these six weeks had made the experiment: but it was generally believed that the subsequent visit to the Head's study would end in a birching.

Jack, however, knew that—for him—it would end in expulsion.

Bell knew it too, and hence his horror.

"You must go and ram old Barnes," he said.

Jack cheered up at once. He had not thought of that. Ramming masters—which is, in ordinary English, escaping a given punishment by playing on the master's feelings—was an accomplishment in which he excelled. Full of praise for Bell's suggestion, he set off at once for the master's room.

Mr. Barnes was in, but not at all ready to be rammed. In fact, no one could have wished for a worse subject on whom to try a process never easy. Even Jack, who had not been in his Form yet and had thus been optimistic, came gradually to lose hope.

"But, *sir*," he said, in the tones of one speaking to a person quite illogical, "I've told you. If you make me write these *Pœnas*, I shall have to go to Mr. Wise; and if I go there, I shall have to go to the Head Master and he is going to expel me."

"Very logical and very sad," said Mr. Barnes.

"Then you're going to get me expelled for smashing a lamp glass?" Jack asked, almost in anger.

"No," said the other very gently. "Now we are *not* logical. It is you, Bird, who are getting yourself expelled. *I* am only giving you four Pœnas, a very moderate punishment for what you call 'smashing a lamp glass.' I know nothing about this expulsion, which must be due to previous follies on your part."

"But I've just told you," Jack cried hotly and forgot the "sir."

"Told me as a *friend*, yes," and Jack writhed; "but as a master I only know that I have given you a deserved punishment and I expect it done."

"I'll stay in for two half-holidays, sir, instead," returned Jack, forcing himself to be humble. The case was desperate.

"No," corrected Mr. Barnes. "You'll write me the four Pœnas, Bird."

"Very well, sir. Thank you," said Jack bitterly and turned to go. He knew that loss of temper would only mean an earlier visit to the Head.

"Not at all, Bird," suavely answered Mr. Barnes. "We all of us must do our duty. *You* must do your Pœnas as *I* had to give them. Unless, of course, you'd rather go to the Head Master?"

Jack stormed back to number five. Bell, in this hour of crisis, had cancelled a promise to play "small game," and for the second time in one day he and Edwards sat anxiously awaiting their poor friend's return. This half-term promised to be rather too exciting.

"Well?" they both exclaimed.

"Rotten!" cried Jack, hurling his straw hat

down violently. "Just like that old swine. Won't budge an inch at any price. I wish I hadn't been; he simply revelled in it, the old beast!"

"Yes, yes," said Edwards soothingly, "but what's to be done now? It's no use ramming Wise, ever, is it? But you simply *can't* go to the Head, the very day that he——"

"That's it!" Jack burst out, as though Edwards had suggested something and he picked his straw hat up again. "That's just what I'll do!"

"What is?" asked Bell.

"Go to the Head! Barnes gave me the alternative. He meant to be funny, the sarcastic swine, but that's just what I'll do and then he'll have the fun of having scored off his own rotten self."

"Yes," said Edwards soothingly once more, "but then you'll get the sack."

"Oh no, I shan't! Because, you see, I shan't have been 'sent' there by a master. I'm just *going*!" Jack Bird laughed quite happily. He was by the door now, his face flushed with excitement. "How topping! I should love to see old B. when he hears of it!" And with these words he went eddying out.

His two friends sat in puzzled silence for a little. "I must say I don't see it," remarked Edwards presently.

"I do." Bell was usually quicker. "But I don't like it. Jack hasn't thought it out. Of course the Cod is bound to ask if he's been nabbed and then he'll count it just as though Jack had been sent up by Barnes. And anyhow, in the end, Barnes

will tell him all about the Pœna paper, and then——” Bell’s gesture was expressive. “I do wish we had stopped the ass!”

“*Nothing* stops him when he is like that,” said Edwards gloomily. His prophetic vision of that departing cab loomed nearer still.

“*I know!*” cried Bell suddenly: and now, in a moment, he looked no less excited than had Jack just now.

“What? Something to get him out of the hole?”

Bell thought for a few seconds, as though perfecting details. “Yes. You’d help, wouldn’t you?”

“Help? I’d do anything. You know I would.”

Bell spoke very rapidly. “I’m going to take you at your word, Ted. I can’t explain the whole scheme, there’s no time, but skin along to the Head’s study, all you’re worth, and swear *you* broke that pane.”

“What? Me?” cried the virtuous Edwards.

“Don’t quibble, man, but buck along.” Bell pressed a cap into his fingers. “If your conscience hurts you, tell it that you *did* because but for your pulling Jack’s arm like a silly idiot, he would have thrown right in the air. But never mind your conscience for this once, man! Why, it’s to save *Jack*, don’t you see? It’s the last chance. Buck up, man! And make old Fish-Face believe it, too.”

The timid Edwards, pushed and hustled to the door, had no time left for protest. These desperate enterprises were not in his line, although he was Jack’s friend. He had not used a Pœna paper yet,

this term. . . . But now—why, Jack was in danger : and yes, he *did* see ; it had been all his fault.

“ I *will*,” he said, with earnestness as great as any bridegroom’s, and dashed along the study-passage.

Bell drew out his watch. To see him, one would say he was a man who made some nice calculation. He also—oddly enough in such a time of stress—looked like a boy who shared with himself a very pleasant joke.

V

“ Well, Bird,” said Mr. Codrington, almost fondly, “ I can’t pretend that, after my warning to-day, I expected to see you here again so soon ; but I think that your having come straight to me to report what you assure me was an accident, is full of good omen and in the circumstances I think we may—— Come *in* ! ”

The last two words did not express his conclusions on the matter but were due to an imperious, if agitated, knock upon the door.

The Head Master spoke with some impatience. He hated interruptions when he was engaged and even Bird had come upon him whilst busy with mid-term reports.

Jack, too, was annoyed. Clearly the Head was just about to say that he would pardon him—make him pay, perhaps, for the smashed glass—and then this beastly knock had come ! One never knew, quite, in these cases. After an interruption, all his

good work might be undone and the Cod, upset by something meanwhile, might come to a quite different decision.

Master and boy both glared at the opening door.

And in staggered Edwards, breathless but terribly earnest in his resolve to save at all costs his dare-devil friend.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he cried excitedly.

"Well, Er-er-er," (Mr. Codrington always cleared his throat when he did not know the name of one of his five hundred boys), "and what is it?"

"Please, sir, are you hauling——" Here he paused. "Hauling" was slang, but he could not find any other word. "Do you think, sir, that Bird broke that pane of glass?"

"I have his own word for it," answered the Head dryly. Jack stood full of astonishment and vague distrust. What on earth had brought old Edwards, of everybody, here? *He* knew nothing about getting out of rows!

"Well, sir," said Edwards with quite an heroic ring about his voice, "he didn't do it, sir. I did." His terror showed itself in "sirs."

The master sat silent for some moments.

"You did it?" he asked slowly.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, then, what is your name?" Clearly this matter was too involved to be carried on with Er-er-ers!

"Edwards, sir."

"Very well, then." Mr. Codrington spoke with

a deliberate calmness. He wanted, being of a suspicious nature, to feel quite sure that this was not a rag. "So we now have two boys, Bird and Edwards, who have both broken a lamp on the School drive. I suppose we may take it that it is the *same* lamp?"

"Yes, sir," answered Edwards guilelessly; and Jack more than ever could have kicked him. Silly, interfering, clumsy fool!

The Head Master leaned back in his chair and joined his finger-tips. He was only thirty-four and felt hideously nervous at any episode outside the usual routine: but that made him seem outwardly more at ease and middle-aged.

"Is it possible, Edwards," he asked (for it was quite clear which was the better witness to examine), "that one or other threw a stone later and so broke a pane which he had not noticed to be already broken?"

"No, sir," blundered Edwards, and Jack saw vanish all his hopes of outwitting Barnes,—found returning all his dread of that cold welcome to a disgraced son at home.

"This is peculiar," began Mr. Codrington with an irony designed to hide his puzzled awkwardness. (What would the old Head have done?) "We now have it that—— COME in!"

This time he spoke with a real impatience; could he get no peace at all? And this time, both the self-convicted culprits swung listlessly about.

This time, too, it was Bell who hurried in.

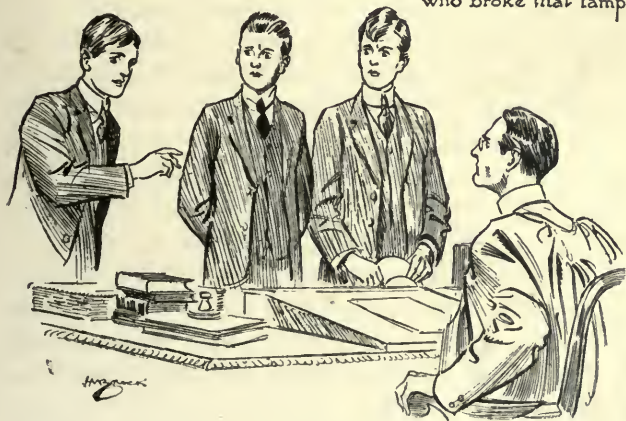
"Oh, sir," he said, trying not to smile at the

astounded faces of his friends. "There has been a mistake."

"Indeed, Bell?" asked the master coldly. With this boy he had had dealings. He knew his name and had suspicions of his character. "Please enlighten me."

"It was me, sir," cried Bell, "who broke that lamp on the School drive."

"It was me, sir," cried Bell
"who broke that lamp"



Mr. Codrington, in his astonishment, forgot to be ironical about Bell's grammar.

During these first terms of his rule at Sherborough he had been subjected to a certain amount of annoyance, due to the unpopularity in store for any school reformer; but there had been nothing so elaborate or so daring as this. All his doubts as to whether it was a rag or not were now set at rest. He began to wonder, instead, whether a lamp had

ever been broken at all ! Probably the whole thing was an invention designed to make him a laughing-stock for the whole School. . . . You never could be sure, with Bird.

Being quite young and very sensitive to popular opinion, he flushed ; and the three boys read it as a danger signal.

Well, the chief thing was to tackle this business firmly and at once—before any other fellows came with their confessions ! He would show Sherborough that it was a dangerous game to play practical jokes even on a new Head Master.

“ Exactly,” he said for no special reason except to gain time. “ The situation is now this. All you three boys, on your own showing (which I am willing to accept) have not only committed wanton damage to school property but broken the rule as to throwing stones upon the School site. The only extenuation is that you have confessed. Bell and Edwards, you will both come to my ante-room at three on Saturday and write me out twelve Pœnas. Bird, I want a further word with you. Bell and Edwards, you may go.”

Shamefacedly they went. Edwards, in all his life, had never got so big a punishment, and in Bell’s ears also there rang accusingly those words “ Twelve Pœnas.” *He* was not thinking of himself. How had he helped poor Jack ? Merely changed his four Pœnas into twelve—and Jack had only one to show !

“ Now, Bird,” said the Head Master firmly, as they closed the door, “ What have you to say ? ”

"I don't know, sir," was all that Jack could light on at the moment. These last minutes had not made his prospects brighter.

"In that case, Bird, I suppose *I* must say what I have got to say : and that is this." He suddenly began speaking with a haste that suggested he was not too far from loss of temper. "You have come in here, only two hours after I had warned you, and—either as a joke or in stupid revenge—have tried to make a mockery of the School discipline. No"—(as Jack began to speak)—"it is idle to protest. I am forced to say that I cannot believe, considering the respective records of you, Bell and Edwards, that *you* were anything except ringleader."

"But, sir, I *did* break the glass."

"That may be," said Mr. Codrington, determined not to get on that subject again, for he felt sure by now that nobody had ever broken one. "It makes the case no better ! I wish to hear no more about the glass."

Well, that was so far good ! Jack with a new hope tried again. "But, sir, Mr. *Barnes* was going to punish me for it."

"Tell Mr. Barnes," said the Head Master icily, "that *I* have seen to it." He did not mean to discuss the humiliating "rag" with any of the masters. His main idea was to settle the business here, in such a way that the laugh should be permanently upon his own side.

This was better still ! Jack began to grow more hopeful. So much for old Barnes !

Suddenly, however, the Head's stern tones of doom drove out all his cheery visions.

"I have come to the conclusion, Bird—and I do not intend to argue—that, for some reason or other, you have made a deliberate attempt to bring my authority into disrepute and make me ridiculous. I am fully aware that I should not be exceeding my duty or powers if I expelled you " (and for a moment, once more Jack's heart seemed to stop). "This I do not intend to do, because I believe that there is good in you somewhere." (Secretly, having been not long ago a boy—and quite a rowdy one at that—he felt Jack to be a sportsman and an enterprising little fiend.) "I mean, therefore, although I feel that it is weak, to give you once more the last chance that I offered you this morning. You cannot, however, be forgiven for your outrageous conduct, and I shall now consider whether I give you the flogging you thoroughly deserve or let you off with the same punishment that I gave the other two."

For the second time in one day Jack stood waiting anxiously in agony, for the decision. This time, however, he longed for the severer punishment !

Twelve Poenas—why, they meant expulsion. . . .

"You are a senior boy, Bird," said the Head presently, trying to find good excuses for a leniency he secretly desired, "and you have had two floggings from me already."

He was just about to give his merciful decision of an imposition, when Jack had an inspiration.

"There's luck in odd numbers, sir!" he said with a genial, open smile.

It was a bold move, but effective.

Mr. Codrington's temper, only just repressed a while ago, burst out finally at this.

"Very well, Bird," he cried, hurrying to the cupboard where his birch-rods were reputed to be hung in serried rows like Bluebeard's wives. "How *dare* you? You shall *not* write Pœnas. I will teach you politeness, however senior you may be." Then, in the old School formula: "I shall *flog* you." Down with your breeches, sir, this very moment!"

* * * * *

Ten minutes later, for the third time in one day, Jack Bird rejoined his anxious friends in number five. Edwards, green and broken, was thinking guiltily of those twelve Pœnas as well as of his best pal's doom.

Jack, moving somewhat awkwardly, came in with an angry glare upon his face.

"Well, of all the *fools*!" he started, hurling his hat down with more violence than ever. "The old Cod was just swallowing it all; awfully bucked at my coming to own up; and I should have got off——"

"Yes, with four Pœnas or so; and you've not the paper for a couple," said Bell, quite unmoved. Then, anxiously: "But what has he done *now*?"

"Swished me," said Jack sulkily. "Two dozen, too. Said I'd committed two offences."

"And Barnes?" asked Bell eagerly.

"Oh, blow Barnes!" cried the alliterative Jack, still angry. "I've paid for the beastly glass,

haven't I? But you don't suppose I want two dozen of the very best, thanks to your bungling, just for a beastly broken glass?"

"*You* don't see, my boy," said Bell happily. "You've *not* got any Pœnas for old B.; you've *not* been sent up to the Head; Barnes is scored off; you're not expelled; and then you look at your deliverers—who've lost their half on Saturday—as though they were mere murderers!"

Then slowly, but surely, as he gazed fondly at his friend, the glad expansive smile spread across Jack's genial features.

VI

When John Bird, an honoured old Sherburian, is asked what was the most extraordinary thing he remembers during all his long time at the School, he always says it was—easily—those six weeks that he spent without getting a single Pœna.

And Mr. Codrington, Sherborough's most popular Head Master, when arguing about principles of Education or the theory of Punishment, never fails to quote the same case. He still knows nothing of that one lone Pœna which Jack had as margin, and he always mentions that ideal half-term as a convincing instance of the splendid policy of Forgiveness, however weak it may seem, even with the wildest boys.



The RAID



OTHER BURT'S had always been the recognized meeting-place for Ardburians on Sunday afternoons.

Recognized, that is, by the boys themselves; to the masters, officially, there was no tuck-shop other than that conducted by the School, and this was open only on week-days. As for the Prefects—well, once made Prefects, they went discreet walks in the opposite direction and tried to forget that they had ever been just ordinary boys or known of such a place as Mother Burt's. Sometimes, on hot afternoons, they would think regretfully of her cold milk and fresh-picked strawberries—but they were Prefects now and those were joys for them no longer. Mother Burt's was out of bounds, forbidden. They must not go as friends, and as foes they would not, for she had been an Ardborough institution during some thirty years. There were

masters at the School who, as boys, had tasted of her dainties and enjoyed her friendship; but they, too, made an effort to forget. . . .

Altogether if there has ever been a forbidden thing that was both winked at and entirely harmless, it is this habit of spending Sunday's tea-time with old Mother Burt.

But all this must be changed, when Brickdale came as the Head Master. Almost everything was to be changed, in fact; Brickdale was a new broom, and he meant to sweep quite clean. Perhaps, in the end, Ardborough was better for it, but there were things that might have been left as they were, and chief of these ranks Mother Burt. From one-thirty until seven o'clock is a long interval between meals for growing boys, and no tea-shop in the land could be better conducted or more cleanly than the little cottage perched upon the Downs.

It was not until his third term of office, in the summer, that Dr. Brickdale heard of this institution. The officious mother of a day boy (who had never been there) made it her duty to inform the new Head Master, who straightway sent for his Head Boy.

"Sit down, Appleton," he began in the brisk tones that always seemed to hint at action. "I want to speak to you."

Appleton shuddered. There had been so many things about which Brickdale had wished to speak and each had meant reform, disturbance, trouble. The Summer Term was not made for reforms! He began to envy the easy life of his predecessor.

"Yes, sir," he said patiently.

The Head Master tapped a letter that lay upon his desk; even this he did with energy. "I have heard, Appleton—no matter from whom—that certain boys are in the habit of going on Sunday afternoons to a cottage close beside the Downs. Do you know anything of this?"

Appleton felt a strange confusion, almost guilt, as the keen eyes, too young-seeming for those of a Head Master, swung around suddenly, threatening to pierce his brain.

"I—I know they used to go, some time ago, sir," he stuttered, nervous as a new boy. Mother Burt, two years ago, had been a valued friend.

"But there is a distinct School rule that all cottages are strictly out of bounds. Have you made no attempt, since you were Head of the School, to find out whether the breach of it still continues, and if so, to check it?"

Brickdale was not an Old Ardburian and now he gazed at his Head Boy as at rather a nerveless and feeble creature. Appleton, spurred by his look and by the wish to help old Mother Burt, was moved to explanation.

"It's only for milk or strawberries, sir. Fellows have always gone since I remember."

But the Head Master—himself a man of iron discipline, no compromise and boundless energy—failed totally to understand.

"They must go no more, Appleton. Please realize that finally," he said firmly and with something in his tone that spoke of scorn. "It makes

no difference what they go for, or whether they have always gone; it is a matter of principle. What is the object of having rules if they are broken, or Prefects if they do not see that things are right?



"Do you know anything of this?"

I rely on you and your colleagues of the Sixth to stop this breach of a School rule immediately."

"But——" began Appleton.

The Head Master held up his hand. Ardborough found his firmness just a trifle tiring. "There is no 'but,' Appleton. I instruct you, as my Head Boy, to go to this cottage with others of the

Prefects, next Sunday, and to punish every boy whom you find on the premises."

Appleton's face fell, for here was a project unthinkable to an Ardburian and, above all, to a former friend and patron.

Suddenly he saw with joy a good plea of excuse. "I'm afraid, sir," he said, "they'd see us coming. The Prefects *have* sometimes tried to raid the place, I rather think:" (he spoke with doubt :) "but the cottage is up on a hill and some one keeps a look-out, so that the top-hats are seen in the distance and every one goes out the other way." (Only Prefects continue to wear top-hats on Sunday after morning Chapel.)

Brickdale's eyes sparkled with the lust of battle. "That seems simple enough, Appleton," he answered. "You can divide your forces and approach it from all sides at once. Also, for this day, I will give the Prefects leave to wear straw hats in place of their usual top-hats."

Now it was the boy's turn to feel scorn, since the master, in his mania for detection, seemed to have infringed the laws of cricket. The Prefects in disguise! One or two of the fellows had already suggested "Sherlock" as nickname for Brickdale, in place of the more obvious "Brick," which did not seem to suit him except at times when keenness led him into blunders.

But he was the Head Master and here was an order given to a boy, though the Head Boy. There was no arguing, no disobedience possible; Appleton had made his protest and had not succeeded.

" Yes, sir," he said rather grudgingly and walked with slow steps back into the Prefects' library.

Wharton, at this moment, was its only occupant. He was second in the School, Appleton's rival, doing twice as much work but owning half the cleverness. It was the Head Boy's duty to be friendly to his lieutenant, but friendliness is usually quite opposed to friendship. Appleton, burning with the desire to share his righteous indignation with a Prefect, felt a chill settle on him when his eyes beheld the only specimen and all his angry phrases fell from him. He did not even ask Wharton what he thought was the Brick's latest.

" Been seeing Brickdale," was all he said, almost calmly. Wharton gazed up from his work, though not before he had reached a full-stop in his text.

" Oh ! What about ? " He spoke in very official tones, for he took his responsibilities in earnest and was a most important person—to himself.

" He wants us to put down Mother Burt's ! "

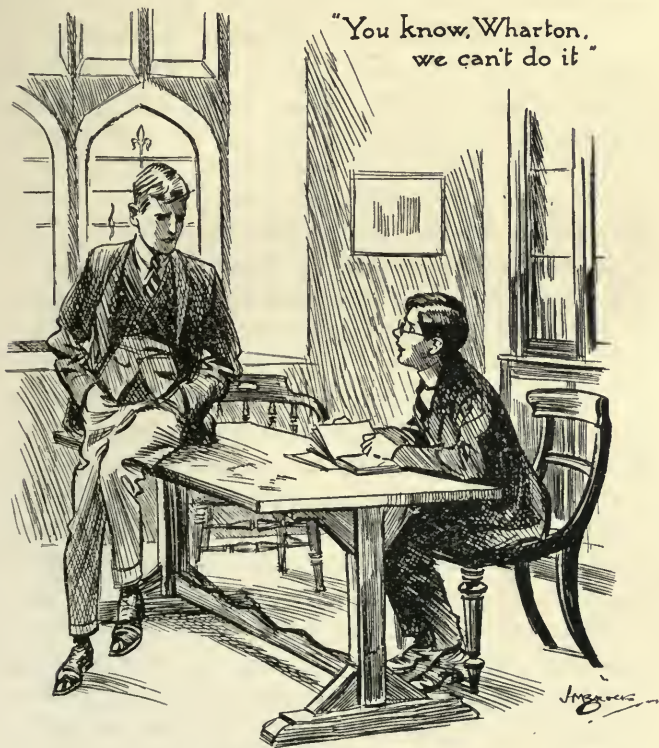
Now, indeed, a certain note of angry scorn crept into his voice, but Wharton, to judge from his reply, did not observe it.

" When ? Next Sunday ? " he answered, in the alert tones of a policeman. Frankly, the idea daunted him a little : this was a big thing to do, a thing sure of its opposition ; but he owned a very lively sense of duty.

" Yes. Next Sunday."

Appleton said this absently, and for some moments stood in silent thought, so that Wharton began to peep once more at his Sophocles ; he

wanted, if he could, to reach a certain point before nightfall. He was just getting well into an awkward passage, when Appleton startled him by a remark.



"You know, Wharton, we can't do it."

Here was a new side in Appleton: he had not thought that he would funk!

"Why not?" he asked coldly. It was something fresh to be able to feel condescending.

"Why, surely you must see! There's no harm in the place: it's a School institution, and how the poor old lady lives; and besides that, we've all been there ourselves."

Wharton laughed. "Perhaps *you* have! I haven't."

Something in the way he said this angered Appleton, and he had quite a struggle not to answer that "all the decent fellows who weren't smugs" had been. But what could one gain by a row with Wharton? "Well, most men have," was his actual reply, "and the whole thing's all rot. Brickdale says there's a rule against it and Prefects ought to see that rules are kept; but it's a piffling rule."

"All the same," said Wharton, tilting his chair back and abandoning his work for a moment, "I *do* think it puts us Praes in a rather false position. I mean, it *is* a rule, and everybody breaks it. Why, some of the little blighters in my dormitory were talking about Mother Burt in front of *me*, the other night."

Appleton could not endure Wharton when he grew superior. "I should have licked them," he said with emphasis, as he went out, and there was a hint of triumph in his face, for he knew that Wharton feared the scorned "blighters" and had never laid a hand—or brush—on any one of them. Feeling less irritated after his ignoble victory, he went in search of Prefects who would summon greater indignation at the Brick's new edict.

Nor did he light on any stint of these. Every-

one said it was rotten, Brickish; but everyone quite saw it must be done.

“What awful worms the School will think us!”

“And poor old Mother B.!”

“It’s foul bad luck.”

But Appleton, amid the din of protest, suddenly saw light. There was no second way; so much was clear. Brickdale had spoken, and Mother Burt’s must undergo a raid. Yet some of the Prefects noted an odd gleam in his eye, as he explained the details, later, in the Sixth Form Room.

“All right, then, it’s settled—Sunday afternoon. We’ll start out, all of us, directly after School. The Brick wants us to divide forces, so we’ll go two and two, and each approach from opposite directions. Better go in the Form order: I’ll take Wharton.” (As the papers say, “A laugh.”) “And the Brick specially wants us to wear straw hats, as toppers would be seen. That’s quite plain, then. And of course it’s understood that nobody will say a word to anyone who’s not a Prefect.” He said this last very seriously, so that nobody could doubt his really meaning it. There were those who till now had, secretly, seen a way out by warning one—just one!—of their friends, and—of course!—begging him not to warn the School at large, or he would spoil the raid. . . . But now, noting how earnestly Appleton, more frivolous till then, had said those words, they saw that he for one would go through with the scheme exactly as the Brick had wanted, and they felt a little shame. Everybody had always recognized Appleton to be the best

Head Boy that Ardborough had known for years, and no one was surprised that he should put his own feelings below the Head Master's orders.

Thus next Sunday saw the unwonted spectacle of all the Prefects setting out in pairs, attired in the straw hat of the mere ordinary mortal. Not a word had been said by one of them to anybody else.

Others, however, saw the spectacle, and it seemed odd ; for as a rule a Prefect would not waste himself upon another but go with some one who, otherwise, would not have been permitted out of bounds. Besides, straw hats . . . ! Above all, Appleton and Wharton out together . . . ! Everybody, especially those setting out for Mother Burt's, saw and remarked upon it. . . .

Todd was of the first to see. Todd was, as a rule, not slow ; he was a fairly new Ardburian, but he knew the ropes and saw and did about as much as most.

Now having seen, enjoyed and mocked (at a safe distance) he gripped the arm of his companion and hastened out into the country.

Half-an-hour later the farm-hand who, on Sundays, earned an extra wage as Mother Burt's assistant, perceived big boys approaching two and two from every side. They were so much larger than the usual patrons, and their tactics were so much those of a Volunteer field-day, that three-parts of an idiot as he was, he yet had sense to summon Mother Burt. Five minutes later, the cottage was in a state of siege.

Around it stood the fourteen Prefects of Ard-

borough's royal foundation. The door had been tried and the windows; both resisted. Spotless curtains hid the interior from view. Smoke wreathed quietly from the old red chimney of this idyllic cot, and that was all.

The fourteen Prefects of Ardborough's royal foundation felt uncommonly like fools.

That sensation grew as, by twos and threes, Ardburians chanced to pass the spot and naturally took an interest in the wholesale doings of their respected Praepostors. Soon there was a crowd upon the roadway.

"Look here," said Appleton, "we must simply force our way inside, that's all. We can't go back and tell the Brick we weren't able to get in. So here goes!" With which words he put his firm shoulder against the cottage door. But it was firmer, as indeed it was much older, and a snigger came from the growing group outside. Appleton's ire rose, and in spite of himself he began to feel almost an interest in this raid of which he was the unwilling leader.

As he debated the next move, an upper window was flung open, and from it leaned old Mother Burt, indignant. Appleton had never known that she had such a flow of language. She wished to know what these mischievous boys were a-doing, pestering a respectable widow woman of a Sunday; and the moral of her homily was that if they broke so much as a pane of glass or a door-bolt, she knew who'd have the law against them, that she did. There were both sense and legal knowledge in this



last, and Appleton quite saw that they must not use force. Mother Burt retired, successful, with an angry slam of the small attic window. She thoroughly amused the mob and had a big success.

Appleton began to lose his temper.

It seemed as though the whole School were behind him now; and obviously it was enjoying the performance. Yet he could not admit defeat.

Wharton, in this moment, was the man of inspiration. The occasion seemed to him Napoleonic; he was in the midst of history, doing something; and his mind worked swiftly, aiming at success.

"I know, Appleton," he cried suddenly.

"What?" rather sharply.

"Wait till Roll-Call, and then see who isn't there and make them prove that they weren't here."

Really, it was rather sound, and Appleton, whose keenness grew with opposition, was as anxious now to make a haul as he had been, before, to come back empty. He owed no ill-feeling to old Mother Burt, did not wish to suppress her cottage, but with all the School watching, this raid must not end in a fiasco for the Sixth Form's sake. He pleased Wharton vastly by praising his idea, and the fourteen Prefects sat down on the grass to wait.

But the comments of the crowd—its very presence—were a little trying.

"They want strawberries." "Sit down, won't you?" "Wharton's keen on milk." "Half-time!" "What about the lemons?" Witticisms

such as these abounded, but never might their ventriloquial author be identified. Appleton could see no remedy. The road was in bounds (though the cottage was not), and they had every right to stand there: he could not move them on, like a policeman. They were breaking no rules, so that he might do nothing as Prefect; as athlete, he could not set out to kick two hundred!

And whilst he sat there blushing, with his fellows, a diversion offered. Once again the attic window opened, and out leant the farm-lad. Those upon the road greeted him frankly and unashamedly as an old friend.

"Hullo, Bert!" the cry arose. "Rough luck!" and "Any one inside?" whilst from a squeaky voice came the advice to "hide them in the cellar." But Bert was looking at the enemy, and as chance willed it, his gaze fell first on Appleton, and being of quicker sight (though slower wit) than his employer, he knew him instantly as an old patron.

"Mäaster Appleton," he shouted, waving a tremulous finger of denunciation, "that be 'ee, sure enough. That be Mäaster Appleton," and then overcome by the sight of such treachery, he rocked his half-witted body so that it seemed the rickety old window must fall out, and shouted in a frenzy, "Judas! *Judas!*"

Ardborough, upon the roadway, was delighted. Here was a new name for Appleton!

"Judas!" they howled happily, till Appleton looked round—and from that day he was called Judas by his friends, then Jew, in the next term

Ikey, and finally just Mo; and thoroughly enjoyed the title, having a straight nose.

At the moment, however, he was far distant from enjoyment. He was not used to failure, and never in his time of office had he found himself in a posture so humiliating. Technically he could do nothing, but anger does not reason, and as the crowd grew more hilarious—murmurs and whispers turning to open mockery—he rose, swung about, and walked up to the fence. A sudden silence fell upon them all. Each tried not to feel either a fool or afraid, and with their inane half-smiles frozen on their faces, they struck him as a rotten enough set. A rapid glance showed none of the big fellows that he knew. Above all, it showed him Todd, close up in the front, still entertained; one of the few not to grow humble at this overwhelming presence; smiling right across his face; cheery, hatless and dishevelled. Appleton chose him as victim.

“What do you imagine you’re playing at, Todd?” he asked scornfully. “And where’s your hat? You aren’t a slum child. Why don’t you go and get clean, instead of minding other people’s business? This is jolly funny, isn’t it, but if you don’t look out, you won’t be so amused at sixers.” (“Sixers” is Ardburian for the law courts of the Prefects, where boys get beaten.)

Todd’s smile died; but when Appleton turned away, the others—as is a crowd’s way—gave a half-cheer and muffled chuckle of amusement. Before long they were as happy as before.

It was decidedly a real relief when Roll-Call drew near. Two by two, prudent boys began to break from the crowd and to retrace their steps, in fear of punishment, whilst the Prefect whose turn it was to read the list set off schoolwards, amid ironic applause. Clearly the besiegers meant to wait till after Roll-Call, perhaps (some one suggested) even over-night, and it was not worth while to get a lot of beastly punishments, just to see the end, though it had been an awful rag. . . . Slowly they went off and left the Prefects to their own devices.

Presently, while these debated as to how long they should stay before return, the front door, with much groaning of a hinge, was opened, and Mother Burt stood peering at them. Bowing, speaking with the gorgeous, slow irony of her class, she asked them if they were not tired, and would not care to enter. If they liked her garden so much, perhaps her house would please them? And more to that effect.

They hung back for a little, rather ashamed; to many this taste of Mother Burt's sarcasm came as a reminder of old days; but presently Appleton said, "Come along, we must go in. Otherwise the Brick'll think us rotters."

"Besides," said Wharton, quite self-assertive since his bright suggestion, "we shall make *certain* of the fellows then."

Old Mother Burt, still bowing sardonically, stood by the door, as hostess, beckoning them. With old eyes burning dimly in their wrinkled caverns, she scrutinized the boys, seeming to know them and

yet not quite remembering, until as Appleton came past, her face changed and she said, as though some



They hung back for a little,
rather ashamed

one had spoken the name to her, "Appleton!" and then, less dazed, "It's Mr. Appleton."

For an instant her face had lit with pleasure (he

had been a special favourite), but in the next she seemed to remember his treachery, for she turned away from him, even as, unthinking, he held out his hand.

Appleton was hurt. All his detective keenness of an hour ago died suddenly; he no longer felt that he was on his mettle to emerge triumphant and make captures, but was well content to go and tell Brickdale that he had found the cottage empty. And this first big room, the actual tea-room, *was* empty; surely that sufficed? He had no wish to ruin Mother Burt. Her recognition, together with the sight of those neat tables loaded with their dainties, had quite damped his ardour.

"No one here," he said in relief; and the others, feeling much the same, kept up the pretence of being satisfied by search and said, "No, nobody."

But Wharton, for one, had no such memories and his blood was roused. The others struck him as most strangely unsuspecting. He was not so easily to be convinced!

"But look here, Appleton," he said, pointing, "there's another room. They might all be in that and someone ought to go upstairs."

Appleton, mentally cursing him, must make pretence of gratitude for the suggestion, whilst Mother Burt, acidly agreeable, insisted that everyone must go anywhere and all make themselves thoroughly at home. The idiot farm-lad stood by, sullenly regarding "Judas."

And now the last-named could not satisfy his sense of duty or his Head Master without thorough

search, when once it had been suggested and allowed. Two were sent upstairs, whilst he himself approached the other downstairs room. As he reached it, well remembered as an overflow tea-room, Wharton, hugely keen, pressed forward. They entered it together.

And on them, together, fell a sticky mass of strawberry and milk.

The booby-trap trickled, in thick clots, down their clothes, and the straw hat which had held it dropped, with a dull sticky squelch, on to the tiled floor.

Appleton picked the hat up gingerly. Inside its crown were scrawled four letters—T O D D

“I believe,” said Wharton disconsolately, as the unlucky thirteen retraced their steps, “that the fellows saw us starting out and spotted what we were up to, because of our straw hats. That was what did it.”

“Yes,” answered Appleton. “That’s what must have done it,—the straw hats. And they were the Brick’s notion, too. . . .”

But he did not sound half so upset as the other had expected. He seemed to worry most about his clothes.

* * * * *

Dr. Brickdale was relieved, that evening, to hear from his Head Boy that the Prefects, using all his suggested subtlety of tactics, had raided the tea-place and yet found it empty.

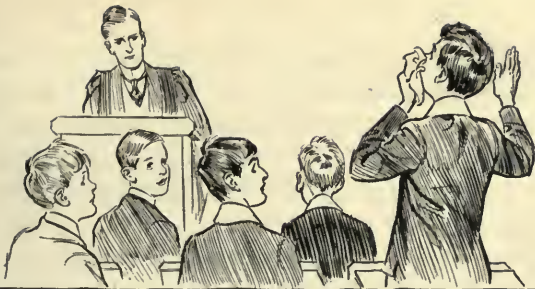
“Thank you, Appleton,” he said briskly, “that is most satisfactory,” and, well content, he turned

his mind to new lines of reform. The tea-shop scandal was all over.

But of course he was not in the Sixth Form Room next morning, to hear the tremor with which Appleton asked, " Would you like to appeal to the Head Master ? " (the usual formula), nor to note the relief with which his Prefects greeted the negative reply of Todd, who was both prudent and a sportsman. Again, he did not hear the thwack of the six hard ones against Todd's tight-drawn flannels, as Maitland (of both First Elevens) exercised his muscles, nor see the writhings of that gentle humorist.

So that if you want an Ardburian on Sunday afternoon, you will be sure of finding him at Mother Burt's.





The DANGER of CLEVERNESS

WYSTON is not usually referred to as a Public School. Even its Head Master, who calls himself the Provost and expects much, has never looked for that. Upon the other hand, he would have a fit if anyone spoke of it as a private school.

Wyston, he claims proudly, is a place apart. It stands, or so the twenty-page prospectus states, In The Forefront Of European Educational Advance. It also stands (see p. 1) on The Banks Of The Tributary River Coot, In a Commanding and Healthy Position. Its chief aim is to Inculcate (p. 4) A Spirit Of Humanity And Culture, Of Love For The Worthy and Pity For The Weak. The Classics therefore are read (p. 7) so far, And So Far Only, as they serve That Purpose. The boys are encouraged (p. 8) to Adorn Their Studies With Masterpieces of Real Art, rather than with the crude Christmas plates and photographs of Worth-

less Wielders Of Bat or Ball, that usually stand for Ornament. A taste in Music is Sedulously Encouraged (ditto) and frequent debates keep the boys in Constant Touch With Life. Hampers are in no circumstances allowed, as Wystonians are taught (p. 11) that Healthy Appetite is quite a different thing from Bestializing Greed and the food provided is More Than Adequate. The Rule Of The Worthy, rather than of the Merely Muscular, is the chief consideration of those in authority when choosing the School Prefects (p. 14). Football "Shorts" Or Abbreviated Flannels (p. 13), are worn all day during the Clement Seasons Of The Year, as making for Agility And Freedom. Flowers are placed upon each table (p. 19) At Every Meal.

The Prospectus, however, with four full-page photographs, is free on application from the Provost, and enough has been said here to show that Wyston as a school is equipped fully with all Modern Improvements. From its foundation in 1899, for six whole years, the Provost declared on page 18 of the Prospectus that Corporal Punishment was On No Account Employed, because a master who could only Rule By Fear had proved himself Incapable Of Ruling.

Of this sentence he was naturally proud, and it was only with great regret that he removed it when the booklet reached its second edition in the year 1906.

In this and in all later editions, clause 65 (p. 18) runs: "The Provost, though theoretically averse from the system of Corporal Punishment, is firmly

convinced in practice that there are certain boys on whom other forms of argument, appeal or influence are lost. It is therefore employed, in rare instances, at the discretion of the Provost."

It is with certain of these certain boys, who largely helped to give the Provost his so firm conviction, that this story deals.

II

Wyston, then, was certainly a place apart. Even those who liked it least admitted it was different. That was the reason why they did not like it. . . .

But fellows, in the end, are very much alike, however far apart one puts them. Even with ten boys on a desert island there would be slackers, rotters and keen sportsmen.

That was what occurred at Wyston.

It is quite likely that the Provost, deeply engrossed in his ideas and splendidly enthusiastic, idealized the boys that he had trained and thought them better than they were. Certainly, whenever he found one or more of them bullying, cribbing, lying, or behaving in any way contrary to what he always called The Great Spirit of Wyston, he seemed to be just as much surprised as he was horrified. He looked upon it clearly as a terrible exception. Really of course, as in most schools, fifty offences were committed for each one detected.

Donkin and Sampson were especially fortunate in that respect. They were two boys who stood

exceptionally high, (as he himself had put it,) in the Provost's regard, although they were in his own House, and it was a mere matter of time before they would be thought worthy, by the principle given above, to be elected as School Prefects.

Not that they were not muscular. Many a small Wystonian had cause to know the opposite. Sampson, in particular, was of a swelling burliness that any county footballer might envy and those who went against his wishes found that the bulk was not all composed of fat. He was masterly with a Corps swagger-stick. Donkin was less strong and smaller, but he had picked up various tricks of offence, largely foul but very adequate for such as brayed at him or mentioned the name Moke.

On the whole, then, they *were* muscular. Both of them, anyhow, with no right to a fag, got all their "brewing" crockery washed up with punctuality and despatch. But it was not, please to remember, the fact of boys being Merely Muscular that made the Provost choose them as Prefects. They could naturally be Muscular without being disqualified, but must be Worthy too. And that was his opinion of these two. . .

Worthiness displays itself, of course, in many forms: so that on the second day of Summer Term Sampson strolled down the study corridor with Donkin hanging on his arm, and though the Provost could not know it, this was how they spoke.

"Rotten luck," said Donkin—except that he did not say "rotten"—"starting the Summer Term with a wet day."

"Dirty sort of trick," Sampson agreed. "What's there to do? It's not worth ramming leave for the Town in this filthy rain." Only, he did not say "filthy."

"Let's go and stir up the new scum," suggested Donkin with a note of hope. And it seemed good to Sampson.

It may shock some readers to be told that Donkin, in saying "new scum," referred to such boys as were comparatively fresh to Wyston. Yet so, alas, it is. For three whole terms, indeed—until a newer lot of scum floats up in the October Term—all new arrivals at this centre of Humanity and Pity For The Weak must labour under that unpleasing title. But this, too, was among those things the Provost did not know. . . .

"Righto!" cried Sampson, with immediate recognition of a bright idea. "Here's number five; it simply reeks of them."

And he banged at a study door.

III

B. Gordon, Wystonian of two terms' standing, looked up with a nervous start. There was a nasty official sort of air about that knock. It easily might be the Provost.

He did not look immensely relieved when he discovered who it really was. He made a futile effort to hide with his arms the open play-box before which he had been found kneeling. He would have shut it if only—like a fool—he had not

proudly spread out half the stuff upon the floor. He managed, by a flying leap, to kneel upon the cake: but such manœuvres are not suited to all sorts of food. A box of preserved fruits, two ditto figs (as the invoice described it), a tin of dessert biscuits, and eighteen bananas were left directly in the path of the invaders.

Five or six boys, all equally still in their third term or less, sat gazing out upon the table, full of a horrified excitement but making it quite clear by their attitude that the affair was in no way their concern. Just now, they had thought Gordon jolly smart to have smuggled all that stuff in past the Matron and were looking forward to their promised share. Now—well, they would see what happened. . . . They all felt rather glad that the grub wasn't theirs.

“Ha!” exclaimed Sampson, with the air of Sherlock Holmes. “Shut the door, Donk,” he added in more level tones.

There was a slight pause. Nobody quite knew what was the next step. Gordon was straddled, his arms across his treasure like a shielding mother. The new scum were still waiting. Sampson stood and thought a little. Donkin looked at his ally. He usually did.

Sampson it was, then, who made the first move.

“All this is against the rules,” he said with sternness worthy of a master.

“Well, you're not a Prefect,” answered Gordon, pulling the bananas nearer.



Angus

"All this is against the ruler"

Sampson took no notice of this quibble. "What's your name?" he asked.

Gordon, whose fighting instincts seemed to be aroused, made no reply except to put the figs back in his box. Sampson moved angrily towards him and then hesitated. The cheeky little swine deserved a lesson, but of course he'd squeak and possibly bring in a Prefect (you never knew on these wet days) and then—No, this was not the time for violence.

"What's his name?" he said casually to the others.

"B. Gordon," they replied in terror, and one of them, just new, said "Sir."

"Well, B. Gordon," remarked Sampson, with crushing emphasis on the initial, "what do you mean by having all this here?"

"What's it got to do with you?" asked the rash Gordon.

"Don't you know Rule 16?" asked Donkin, who felt that it was time he came upon the scene.

Sampson was glad of the hint. "Yes," he said quickly, "don't you know Rule 16, which appears also in the Illustrated Prospectus? Don't you know hampers are strictly forbidden in all cases? Don't you know that the School food is adequate? Can't you realize that healthy appetite is quite different from bestializing greed?" (The Prospectus is a pet joke with Wystonians. But this, once more, the Provost does not know.)

The small kids sniggered nervously, not being sure if they were meant to laugh or no.

But Gordon showed a dogged courage worthy of his splendid name. "I suppose," he amazed every one by saying, "you're driving at the fact you want a bit of it yourself?"

Even Sampson was surprised. He felt that the moment had come to be quite decisive. "No, you cheeky little beast," he answered, "what I'm driving at is that I want it *all*. See? You've no right to it. You'll only make yourself sick with it, like a little swine. It won't harm me so much."

He suddenly decided that there was no point in trying to excuse the transfer in this way. "Anyhow," he ended fiercely, "I darned well mean to have it, see? And if I don't, I'll know the reason why. In the first place I'll come and bash the box open, and then make a beastly row and bring the Prefects in, and where will you be then? Besides, if the whole skish, box and all, isn't in our study in five minutes' time, I'll come back here and turn every blessed one of you scum up and give you eighteen with the swagger-stick. Finally, ladies and gentlemen," he concluded, for he always maintained a dry, condescending humour, even in his most savage moments, "I shall be very sorry for our young friend here upon the right—B. Gordon."

With which he shut the door.

He was just about to express his pleasure at this first transaction of a new term to his partner, when with rather a shock he found himself face to face with the Provost.

Luckily the old man was in his most genial mood.

"How extremely unfortunate!" he was muttering to everyone as he went round the House patting people on the back. "Always extremely unfortunate when to-day is wet. No games, and everybody anxious to make the term's purchases down in the Town! Yes, most unfortunate!"

Sampson, a solid mass, stood barring the way to number five, rather like Horatius of old, but still more like a pro goal-keeper of to-day. It would not do if the Provost, too, confiscated the illegal hamper!

He seemed to have no thought of entering. "Ah, Sampson!" he said, patting him. "And Donkin, too?" (pat). "Most unfortunate. I'm sure Sampson and Donkin are wanting to be in the Town!" Then he peered at the number painted on the study door; whereat the sentinel stood yet more firmly. "But I'm glad to see," and now he laid one hand upon the shoulder of them both, "that Sampson and Donkin are making a good social use of this unfortunate wet day. I'm glad to see," he went on, in the high pitch of a public speaker, "that they are not too 'superior'—hateful word!—to call upon new boys and so break down the absurd barriers against which I have so often spoken."

"Yes, sir," said Donkin, dropping his eyes modestly.

"We must never forget," went on the Provost far more gently, and Sampson suddenly began to dread that the obedient new scum might come out, any moment now, with the play-box, "that we too

were once young, once weak; that age and our full strength are merely accidents which come to all of us, with no real credit to ourselves."



"I'm glad to see
that they are not too 'superior'."

"Exactly, sir." Sampson tried to say this in a way which showed that he agreed and that there was no necessity for further words. The five minutes must be nearly up!

The Provost turned away with a fond smile.

"Good lads!" he murmured to himself sentimentally; and when he reached his study he was still absently murmuring: "Good lads!"

IV

"I say, buck up, Gordon!" chanted the occupants of number five, as with a contemplative slowness he replaced his delicacies very carefully inside the play-box. The one who was quite new to Wyston furtively glanced at his watch. He had not liked the look of that big fellow.

But Gordon was thinking.

"What's it got to do with you?" he asked presently, in his old warlike manner.

None of them answered for a little. Secretly, they felt rather cads. Gordon was their pal and he had promised them a royal spread. Sampson they all hated, but all knew him—and his swagger-stick. . . .

Gordon read their silence correctly. "You don't mean to say," he asked scornfully, "you really mean to let that swine bag them from me?" He pointed vaguely at the "them."

"He's a jolly *beefy* swine," said one of them. "And as a matter of fact," he added, "it's not a matter of *letting* him. We've got to take the stuff along to number eight, or else he'll be back in five minutes and we shall get a rotten time. He's bound to have it in the end, so what's the use of getting us all swiped?" (The word "to swipe,"

Wystonian for "to thrash," was not in the vocabulary of the Provost.)

This argument appealed to all, and Gordon was told on every side the manifold advantages of being a sport rather than a selfish beast.

He did not mean that Sampson *should* have it in the end. The stuff was his and he should be the one to eat it. Sampson he did not even like: never had liked since that first day, two terms ago, when Sampson had asked, "What's your name?" and then kicked him before he had the time to answer.

Irish blood, upon his mother's side, coursed through his veins, and Irishmen, he told himself, never should be slaves.

He thought of fighting, now, at once, to keep the box in number five; but when he reflected they were six to one, realized that Sampson and Donkin would soon be back to make the number eight, he decided that craftiness is finer than mere force.

"All right," he said, slamming the lid down, "if you fellows funk the brute and want to save your blessed skins, take the dirty box away." He spoke as though even his play-box had lost a good deal of its prestige.

Greatly relieved, they hastily rose up and staggered out into the passage with it. The interview outside the door had ended not ten seconds before.

"Gordon's fed," said one of them to another.

But he was only thinking.

V

In one way, school Houses are divided into separate, exclusive sets; yet in another all these small cliques really overlap.

Gordon was down among the "new scum" of ill-odorous name; Sampson, by mere force of arm and also as a third-year man, was something very near what Wynton calls a blood; but even bloods do not have dormitories to themselves or quite disdain help in their construe from some one less magnificent but more industrious. Thus at certain hours the great and the small meet, in a manner to delight the Provost's heart, and any rumour started in the one set spreads, as news can spread only at school, quickly enough to the other.

Gordon, having duly thought and received his empty play-box back in silence, set to work.

Very cautiously, beginning elsewhere than in number five and always telling it as something heard from some one else who had overheard it somewhere, he managed to launch successfully a general rumour that the Provost had heard there was food in the studies and was about to make a raid during Third School to-morrow.

News is always scarce at school, and this tit-bit was an immediate success. The whole House rocked with it.

Sampson was especially interested—so much so, indeed, that he broke the school regulations and left his House that same night after Prayers.

Towards evening, at about Lock-Up time, the rain stopped; and though the water which had

collected on the swing-window got down his neck on the first journey, he was accustomed to leaving



He made in all
six journeys

number eight, where indeed the central bar of the three had been removed for that especial purpose. He made in all six journeys, while Donkin held the door (bloods share a study between two), and finally

he had the satisfaction of feeling that all young Gordon's grub was hidden—till to-morrow after Third School—safely inside the heating apparatus for the Provost's hot-house: a thing that no sane man would use in the midst of July. He went back to number eight well satisfied. Thank goodness he had heard that rumour. It would never do for him to be caught out even in one thing. That made masters suspect you of others. . . . No, the only way was never to make a mistake. If a thing was worth doing, it was worth doing well. . . .

B. Gordon watched the first of these six journeys, and observed with scout-like intelligence the exact spot at which it ended.

He was thinking, still.

VI

Gordon's nose bled during Second School.

The Form Master was annoyed, because they were at a most important passage in their Xenophon: but when a boy stands up, holding firmly to his nose a handkerchief obviously red in parts, what can a master do but nod his head and murmur angrily, "All right, but make haste"?

One cannot help feeling, however, that if Gordon really wished for a hasty recovery he was unwise, in a case of nasal hæmorrhage, to start off along the path to the School House at such a smart jog-trot.

As he got nearer the House, he even let the handkerchief get quite a distance from the affected part.

Further, safely arrived there, the stupid boy went neither to the Matron's room nor to a cold tap but rather to the hot-house, of all places : and finally made things worse by carrying a colossal pile of tins, etc., leaning back like a butler with an especially overloaded tray.



No one is ever about at a school during work-hours, or somebody would surely have objected to such rash behaviour by an invalid !

When he had put the load in his play-box and turned the key, he went back to school without even getting a new pocket-handkerchief.

Red ink, luckily, is healthy stuff.

VII

Everyone played games that day; but just before tea-time Sampson's thoughts turned to the hidden treasure.

"I could do with a bit," he said.

"Not safe," said the cautious Donkin. "How do we know the old boy has been round yet? Awful sell if we brought the stuff back into eight and *then* he raided us!"

"Well," answered Sampson, "we can go and get a bit of it, to carry on with, all the same."

But they couldn't. They looked at the empty hiding-place and at each other in astonishment.

Then they went direct to number five. You never could be sure, with new scum!

"Where's the grub?" they roared at Gordon, who was there all alone.

He looked blandly at them. "It was sent along to number eight," he said.

"None of your lies," bellowed Sampson. "You know you've stolen it."

"I know *you* bagged it," he replied.

"That proves he's got it," said Donkin keenly.

Gordon took out his keys. "Perhaps you'd like to look at my play-box?" he asked and seemed about to open it.

"Yes," Donkin said, and B. Gordon's heart sank.

"Oh, drivel, Donk!" cried Sampson. "Don't waste time. D'you think he'd offer, if he had it there? But by gad," he said fiercely, turning upon Gordon, "if I thought you'd dare to steal *my*

grub——” He left the threat effectively open and turned to the door.

“ Well,” he said as they went out, “ we’re bound to find out in the end who’s got it, and then——”

Gordon was so upset that he unlocked his play-box and ate two bananas.

VIII

“ Holding,” it is written on page 10 of the Prospectus, “ that a social or communal feeling is much to be encouraged among citizens however young, no less than a closer intimacy between boy and master, and also with a view to assisting the digestion, the Provost has arranged that in all Houses the evening, or 6 p.m., meal shall be followed by a half-hour of quiet reading, converse, letter-writing or reflection, at which both boys and House Master shall attend. The time is one valued by all.”

Ungrateful Wystonians have agreed in calling this privilege a bore, and (with all respect to the Provost’s opinions) the time is usually regarded merely as an extra half-hour’s prep.

It has, however, one obvious advantage. The House Master, during these minutes, has the whole number of his boys before him, not busy with either their work or their food. If he has anything to say to them—and the thing is not usually pleasant—this is the clear time to say it. Sometimes, it is true, he offers them congratulations on athletic triumphs, and that everybody likes as an excuse for shouting; but as a rule, if he steps forward to

address the House, there is the prompt suspicion of trouble for someone and all begin to wonder inwardly what the old muddler has discovered.

Thus, when the Provost, at the end of their social half-hour this evening, gave two little coughs and stood up with a slow dignity, none of the fellows thought it was mere "closer intimacy between boy and master."

"Hullo! What's up?" one said to another, nudging him; or "The old boy looks sick. What's he nosed out now?"

An anxious silence fell upon the room.

"I have always," began the Provost; and those who had been long in the House knew, so soon, that it was something serious; "I have always made a point, as you know, of trusting my House. I have never considered detective duty or eavesdropping to be a part of my—er—er——" and very regretfully he found himself compelled to use the word "duty" once again. "But," he said and everybody stiffened, feeling that now the crime detected—with the criminal—would be brought forth, "there are certain things that seem to be whispered at one from every corner till one is forced to take some notice of them."

Everybody by this time was feeling certain that one of his own crimes had come to light, and an immense amount of brain-work was being done among the packed benches in excuse-invention.

"During all the latter part of yesterday," went on the Provost, "a persistent rumour of this sort kept coming to me about the existence of certain contraband eatables in a boy's play-box."

An audible buzz of relief and a relaxing of tense attitudes showed the end of a long strain for all who had no food in their play-boxes. Sampson and Donkin and Gordon, however, all equally found their hearts beating of a sudden in mouth, temples, everywhere except the proper places. Gordon did not know what to think. The others were deciding that the Provost's hot-house had been an unhappy choice. They never knew he was a gardener. . . .

Donkin stirred uneasily on the hard bench. He *did* so disapprove of caning.

"How such a rumour originated it is hard to say," the Provost proceeded and Gordon in turn began to misdoubt his wisdom: "but it was everywhere. So much so, indeed, that though my invariable principle has been to trust my boys, I could not finally stand out against it any longer. Very regretfully, therefore, I have taken the means to my hand. As you know, by Rule 81 I possess a duplicate key to all play-boxes, as a check on their contents: but only once in all these years, when there was a regrettable epidemic of employing 'keys' or unauthorized translations to the construe" (several more hearts began to beat), "have I made use of them."

He paused a moment, and then went on with grave emphasis.

"To-day, while you were here at tea, the Matron and myself performed the always unpleasant duty of going through the play-boxes. We hoped, indeed we hoped, to prove the rumour false. We hoped to find that no boy had disobeyed Rule 16 and—

still worse—virtually told a lie, for play-boxes are permitted only on the understanding that nothing contraband or forbidden shall be concealed in them. I am sorry to say," (he went on,) "our confidence gained no support from facts. You may dismiss now: but I want to see" (there was a ghastly pause) "*B. Gordon.*"

B. Gordon, cursing the "persistent rumour" of his own invention, followed abjectly behind the majestic and indignant Provost.

IX

B. Gordon came out rather limply from the Provost's room.

Opposite the door, against the bookcase in the passage, lolled Sampson and Donkin. The former held with grim firmness in his right hand a Corps swagger-stick. With his left hand he made a gesture of invitation. Then he and Donkin walked along the passage towards number eight.



The OLD SPORT



LONG row of boys, three deep, stood on the side reserved for present members of the School and watched a football match in dogged silence.

This was unusual; for as a rule the fellows were either scattered over the whole field in various games or else roared "Play up, Sefton!" till their voices went.

To-day, however, there was no question of which side would win. This was a mere practice game—"The School Eleven *v.* the Second"—played in that depressing time, the morning break, and nobody felt any need to cheer the School, which was indeed already leading by five goals to none. No; Sefton, this morning, was out to criticize. Almost everybody knew better than the Captain what should have been done in order to beat Sherborough on Saturday.

That was the explanation of this tense, if silent, crowd around the generally neglected Senior Game. To-day was Thursday, Saturday the Sherborough Match; and Friday would be taken as a rest. Here was the last chance, then, of telling Hawkins, the School Captain, (not to his face, be it well understood,) exactly the mistakes that he had made. Of course, as usual, he had chosen his team rottenly. . . . There really *had* seemed a chance, at last, of beating Sherborough. Stupid thing ever to have started playing the match if one was always going to be licked! Looked so jolly bad in the papers. . . . Of course Sherborough was twice as big, and twice as old, but still——! However, that wasn't Hawkins' fault after all, as he hadn't even come to Sefton when the annual match was first arranged. . . .

No, where *he* had made a silly idiot of himself (so ninety per cent. of the Seftonians argued as they swarmed on to the field), was in putting Winter up to play at the last moment.

"Who's Winter?" Something like this ran the contemptuous query. "Why, nobody ever heard of him last year. He just managed to grease his way, somehow, into Hasting's House Eleven, and that's all! Nobody ever *would* have heard of him, either, if that interfering ass Bentley hadn't come down and "spotted" him (this with irony) "and taught Hawkins how to manage his own business."

"Well, Bentley's a Blue," came the retort from those who championed Winter; a class largely made up from boys in his own House, "he ought to know a little bit about it, after all!"

"You've got to know a jolly lot to see a man play in a House match and know straight off he's good enough to play centre-forward for the School! He'll probably get into a blue funk in the match and mess the whole show up; and anyhow it's darned rough on Pollock getting the chuck when he was a 'dead cert' for his Schools."

"Oh, Polly's all right. He said, only this morning, that he thought Winter jolly good."

"Of course, he'd have to! That's only because he's such a sportsman. But it's bound to upset the whole eleven and it's a rotten thing to do, even if Bentley is a Footer Blue."

Distinctly, the Noes had it, as the whole School flocked out to watch and criticize. Bentley, Sefton's great hero until now, found himself regarded with new scowling looks and muttered comments, as he stood in the centre, prepared to referee and coach. What right had *he* to come and change everything, four days before the match? Everyone was full of sympathy for Pollock: utterly resolved to find Winter "simply rotten."

But now, when the game's second half was nearly over, the thing became more and more difficult.

Nervous at first, and flurried by the knowledge that everyone, unconsciously, was hoping that he would make a mistake, the new centre-forward played a cautious game; resolved to win success by the safe old plan of not leaving anything to chance. Soon, however, the instinct of a born player triumphed over a boy's fear of his fellows, and Jack Winter, long before the end of the first

half, was displaying, put on his mettle by strong opposition, that form which the trained eye of the Oxford Blue had detected in a rough-and-tumble House match. Three of the five goals had fallen to his score. It is, of course, a centre-forward's business to put the ball between the posts, nor is a player's total of scored goals the safest measure of his value; but that, at least, was how the Sefton boys, like most, decided who was good. Winter had lost no chances, had even obviously made some for himself; and when, just before Time, a fourth shot went strong and easy half a foot below the cross-bar, even those prejudiced critics whose sporting instincts drew from them a mild, unwilling applause, were bound to admit that "Winter wasn't half bad, after all."

It is never very pleasant for mortals to have to own themselves wrong; whence the chill silence with which they watched this justifying of Bentley's interference. They were too human to reflect that the discovery of a new, good player was no less than a godsend to their School. Winter was nobody, Pollock was adored: and they wanted Pollock to play. So that they watched Winter's triumph—for it was no less—with something like grudging admiration; and as the game ended, there were some human enough to say, "Yes, but Pollock would have been every bit as good."

Bentley was far less half-hearted.

He had judged the player by a better standard. He could shoot true, yes; that was something; but far above these four goals scored he valued Winter's

judgment, his resource, his dashing tactics that gave way to prudence at the fitting moment.

Here, he saw, was a great player in the making.

He said nothing to the boy himself, fearing only to increase the prejudice which he knew the School already had against Pollock's supplanter; but as every one moved, not reluctantly, towards the heated studies and prospects of lunch, he fell into step with Mr. Hasting, in whose House Winter had been for the last three years.

"That's a sound man of yours," he said, with real enthusiasm. "You're lucky to have him in your House. Mark my word, he's a thoroughly strong centre-forward."

The House Master did not seem quite so confident about his luck. He had suffered in his peace of mind not a little from three years of this Winter: and since skill at games always brings influence at school, he found himself wondering what so wild a boy, become one of the House's leaders, might not do.

"Possibly, yes," he answered, in an absent sort of way; "but it is a pity that he's such a weak character."

Really, of course, he would have suffered almost anything, so as to gain a first-rate player in his House: but this train of thought had somehow started first in the brain of a man half sportsman and half pedagogue. It was the sort of obvious retort that men make in a hurry, hardly thinking. Later, old Hasting would rejoice—the sportsman

side of him—count it real “luck” and heartily congratulate Jack Winter.

Unhappily that other came out first; and came out, rashly, in the hearing of a crowd of boys all swarming to their various Houses.

One of them heard, and presently, of course, in a passable imitation of its speaker’s voice, the remark came back to Winter. Indeed, it came back many times. The phrase grew into a House joke, and it was quite the thing, in congratulating Winter, to hide the natural embarrassment of such a moment by adding, in the Hasting manner: “But it’s a *pity*, Winter, that you’re such a bad character!”

Jack heard it in twenty forms before the lunch bell went, and somehow it had managed to annoy him the first time he heard it.

“Really?” he scowled. “It’s a pity *he’s* such a doddering old ass.”

II

It will do as a trite working rule to say that, after listening to the two sides of any heated controversy, Truth may be found somewhere roughly in the middle.

So it was about the Hasting-Winter feud.

The one party was not by any means a weak character nor the other exactly a doddering old ass.

Hasting, in the first place, was not really very old. His age, to be precise, was fifty-two, but he had been at Sefton for twenty-seven years; and when fat Old Boys with flowing moustaches and

fast-falling hair came down to visit him, how could the fellows in his House regard him as anything except a curious survival? They almost excused his peculiarities—which were many—as being the result of dotage; and they always spoke about him as “Old Hasting,” except when they knew him as “The Flying Dutchman,” “Old Dutch,” or (for reasons of geography) St. Leonard.

If Hasting was not altogether popular among the fellows in his House, that was because he always felt it in some queer way his duty, as just now, to put the official, pedagogic side of himself before the natural, which was intensely sporting. In this way he helped a general prejudice, for boys seldom reflect that grey old masters have once been young and irresponsible just like themselves. Nobody at Sefton ever knew that Hasting, while at Winchester, had been in the Cricket Eleven. He did not think it worth the telling. . . .

But why waste time in beating about the bush? There was one chief, real cause why Hastingites did not love Hasting: and it was the food.

Of course, nobody is ever satisfied with a school meal. Among all the Educational Establishments for Sons of Gentlemen, Public or Private, that have existed since someone (prudently unknown) invented the idea of school, there has probably not been one in which the said Sons have failed to grumble at the food set before them, in a quite un-Gentlemanly way.

For one thing, this provides a topic.

The Test Matches; to-morrow's construe; that

ass Robinson; the House's chances for the Footer Cup; or why Smith doesn't wash his beastly neck—these are good enough subjects for a while; but presently there comes a time, about half-term, when they begin to lose their novelty and charm. This is the moment to fall back on the food.

Hasting's House grumbled at it long before half-term. They came into the Hall with sullen faces and went out as quickly as the rules allowed. With much noise they stamped past the House Master's study to the School shop, where they swallowed buns or Swiss rolls in alarming quantities and slept off the effects during a long Third Lesson.

This attitude had long ago grown into a tradition. Lunch, the sole meal during which old Hasting sat in Hall, was a meal to be tackled gingerly. Every now and then, indeed, some senior fellow would give a pained sniff as the meat was put beneath his nose, and this was a clear signal for the whole House ostentatiously to disregard their helping—a sad day for those juniors who had no money for Swiss rolls.

Now that senior fellow was usually Winter: which fact explains another thing—why Hasting called him “a weak character.”

Jack Winter was strong enough, in every way, for ten. Among the School at large he might be dismissed as unknown, a nobody; but that was not the case in Hasting's. There, although not a Prefect yet, he was intensely popular, full of influence and of influence for good. If Hasting had taken him a little differently—appealed to his feelings and

sense—he would have been a very useful man to him : but they had always been at daggers drawn. Hasting, like many masters, thought that noise, energy and mischief must somehow be outward signs of moral badness in a boy and set Winter down as dangerous ; whilst Winter, always willing to accept a challenge, found that the easiest weapon against his foeman the House Master was this already latent discontent about his meals.

To-day, then, more and more angry with that repeated gibe as to his “ bad character ” (for so the saying stood by now), he entered Hall for lunch and took his seat at Hasting’s table in a rebellious mood.

“ Well played, Winter ! ” said the latter. He wanted to say more, but was always painfully nervous upon these occasions.

“ Thank you, sir,” Jack answered, with a studied politeness which was nearly rude. “ I’m glad that you were pleased.”

There was a little snigger at the table ; the Master, puzzled, felt uncomfortable ; and then an awkward silence fell. It was Hasting himself, as usual, who had to break it finally. He turned to Politics, which he always found safe.

Thursday is the day for pie. Tuesday is hot mutton : Wednesday cold—yes, Thursday certainly is pie : and not by any means a bad pie, either. Jack Winter himself would admit that, really. It is largely a matter of monotony ; the pie would be all right if you did not know that it was coming or if it came on Saturday sometimes. After all, a pleasure expected loses half its joy : and how much

more, then, is this true of pie ! To walk into Hall every Thursday, certain that before one will be placed pie, damp cabbage and cold tapioca pudding, is a melancholy act. It would be no better, really, if the menu for that morning were of such luxuries as caviare, asparagus and galantine : for soon an ungrateful House would file into Hall and murmur "*Caviare again !*" It is monotony that bores.

Besides, they did not care about the greens.

Cabbage on Thursday ; and Jack, resolved to be unpleasant but finding the pie totally beyond reproach, scented (in every sense) his victim when the vegetable came.

At the beginning of this term Hasting had placed him at the head table, less as an honour than for the sake of getting him well under observation. No longer could he sniff and give a signal to the House. He sat, indeed, with his back to the three long tables.

As the dish was put down close beside him, however, he elaborately pushed it half a foot away and sat back in his chair, as though straining to escape from an unsavoury object. Hasting tactfully pretended not to notice and helped Winter to pie, first of anyone.

"Take some cabbage, Winter ?" he said blandly. "You must be hungry after your exertions."

"Thank you, sir," Jack answered, so flabbergasted that he could do nothing but obey. He took a square block of the moist, steaming compound and dropped it on his plate, feeling that everybody thought he had not scored for once.

He must do something to retrieve defeat !

Waiting until old Hasting had turned sideways to hand a helping to his right-hand neighbour, Jack rapidly transfixed the solid lump of sodden cabbage with his fork and dropped it underneath the table, where it fell upon the floor with a thud that sounded in his guilty ears like thunder.

The House Master, satisfied with his victory, had long ago forgotten the cabbage incident, and noticed nothing. He did indeed observe some secret joke among the fellows at his table, but these are trifles to which pedagogues soon get accustomed.

Presently, however, just when his boys, in turn, were beginning to forget this second happening, it began making its appeal to him.

Hot cabbage on a wood floor lately scrubbed with soap sets up a curious chemical combination that scientists can probably enshrine within a formula. Certainly, it has one point in common with most of Science's experiments :—it makes a very nasty smell.

The steaming mass, replete with boiling water, had fallen almost under the House Master's feet and soon began sending up its insistent message.

" 'M? 'M? 'M? " he sniffed. " What a peculiar odour ! "

He was too busy craning about and tracing its source to notice the delirious, suppressed amusement of his table.

" Jackson," he cried to the House servant, " close the door, please, and go into the kitchen, will you, and tell Mrs. Hart that there is a most curious odour

here. I think something must be burning." And as his man went on this errand, "Very unpleasant indeed," he said apologetically to the boys about him.

Stupid, he thought to himself, the way a thing like this always amused them! That was why he loathed these accidents. He must talk severely to Mrs. Hart. Already, at the other tables, boys were pretending to think that this odious smell came from the food. . . .

"'M? 'M? 'M?" he sniffed. It was strange that he could still smell it, though the door was closed.

"Please, sir," cried Knox, "I think there must be something horrid underneath the table." He knew that he was risking poor old Jack's discovery: but none the less—in fact all the more—could not resist his joke. He hardly ever could.

Everybody laughed and Hasting grew yet angrier.

"In that case," he said with biting irony, "I depute *you*, Knox, to look under the table and see if there is 'something horrid'!"

Amid unparalleled excitement, Knox gingerly raised the table-cloth and peered beneath: then, as though shocked by his discovery, drew back.

"Yes, sir," he cried, "there *is*—and it's a bit of cabbage."

A roar of laughter shook the tables.

Hasting was furious by now. Scenes like this were quite impossible.

"Who placed the piece of cabbage there?" he asked.

"I did," answered Jack promptly, and almost with pride.

The House Master would have been disgusted, more even than he would have been surprised, if no one had owned up: but the readiness of the confession, and something in its manner, made him yet more angry.

"Yes, sir," he cried
"There is - and it's
a bit of cabbage."



"In that case, Winter," he said, "I shall punish you severely. I consider this a most ungentlemanly way of behaving at anybody's table, and I have cautioned you before as to your conduct in Hall. You will write out the fifth book of Vergil's *Æneid*, and show it up to me by bed-time on Saturday."

The rest of the meal was less hilarious. Vergil's

fifth book may not be his longest, but it runs to some hundred lines; an ample length for anyone who has to copy it, especially for one who does not understand a single word of what it's all about! Besides, to-morrow was a "long lesson," giving no spare time, and Saturday the Sherborough match. How could Winter show the imposition up in time? Everybody sat in a cowed silence, and Hasting's comments upon Preferential Tariffs, delivered in his usual level tones, met with a very cold reception.

"Swine!" muttered every one outside: or "Rough luck, Jack!" if they were thinking, rather, of the victim.

Jack himself was furious. The House Master's lesson on gentlemanly behaviour seemed to have fallen upon stony ground. Perhaps meal-time had not been the most appropriate season.

"Oh, don't pity *me*!" he said, not at all in the manner of a penitent. "Called me a cad, did he? Very well. *I'll* show him what a cad can do!"

III

Nobody took Winter's words with too much seriousness.

These vague threats are the usual way in which a senior boy accepts his punishment. What imposition ever *has* been just? No one is ever going to write it! The Master will see! . . . But in the end, because masters hold the final power, they

generally see nothing—except the imposition at its proper time.

Certainly, old Hasting might have given him a day or two more in which to do the thing. But everybody knew that punishments were hardly ever allowed to run over Sundays, in case they should be done upon that day; and after all, there were devices by which lines could be written in the dormitory. If Jack hadn't wanted the fag of blocking the window with a rug and then writing by a candle's light, he shouldn't have been such a silly ass. Of course it was quite funny, but certain to be nabbed. . . .

In short, before a whole day had passed, the House at large had accepted this sequel to the cabbage joke as it accepted any punishment that was deserved, and was devoting its attention once more to Sefton's prospects in the match.

But not so Jack.

All through Friday's lunch he sat in sulky silence, and when Hasting genially asked his views on the Two-Power Standard, would not say so much as that he did not even know what the phrase meant. The Master, thus snubbed, merely smiled and raised his shoulders, while some of the fellows began to wonder that Winter did not take the thing in a more sporting spirit. He had certainly deserved what he got, they saw now; and their sympathies began to veer round towards Hasting. Jack seemed so absurdly worried about the whole affair! When they asked him if he had begun his work, he merely told them to shut up, or said he didn't want to

talk about the beastly thing, and hadn't he told them he didn't mean to do the rotten book? So they left him alone and wondered.

The fact is, Jack *was* worried. Hasting's long process of misunderstanding him had brought about a sort of enmity, which his hasty retort to the Blue's congratulations had carried to a head. Jack, as his move in the war which he felt thus declared, had fallen back upon the safe old grievance of the meals—and promptly laid himself open to a public rebuke of not knowing how to behave as a gentleman's guest! That rankled. It seemed to him, already sensitive, not only a victory for Hasting, but yet one more wrong. The thing had been a mere harmless joke. *He* knew, as well as anyone, how to behave! . . . He was very serious about it all, and like most people with a grievance, quite irrational.

Besides, apart from that, Hasting had scored; and if the book was shown up, he would score yet further. Jack was not going to do his punishment tamely for that old swine, just like a Lower Third Form boy, and so admit that the lecture on good manners had been merited! Not he! . . . And much more in that noble strain.

In fact, blinded with unreasoning rage, an eruption that followed on long smouldering, he embarked upon that most hopeless of all battles; the fight between a powerless boy and a master who has the whole force of the School behind him. He was a cad, was he? (Once again that battle-cry!) All right, then; he'd get equal with old H. before the

House; he must do that, for very pride, and show him what a cad could do!

Unluckily the same passion that spurred him on to action made him also quite incapable of lucid thought: which goes some way towards explaining why a practised doer of harmless evil, usually so expert that he was never detected except when the culprit was invited to confess, now found himself bungling this important business.

Mr. Hasting, returning to his study a trifle earlier than usual after Third School, was astounded to see Winter standing by his desk.

"Well, Winter," he exclaimed, "what can I do for you?"

No doubt come to try and beg off part of that punishment: such was his first thought, although he was surprised to find the boy waiting there and not outside the door, as is the usual course.

But Winter, guilt's victim, blushed and could not think of anything especially desired. (Why had he not put someone to keep watch?)

The Master grew suspicious.

"Well, Winter," he repeated with far less pleasantness, "what explains your presence here?"

Still no answer: and he moved forward, to see if he could find out for himself.

He could. "What is that, sir?" he thundered, pointing a tremulous finger at a green substance that reposed upon some sheets of foolscap.

"Cabbage, sir," said Jack and suddenly felt a colossal fool. What a childish trick—Lower Third, indeed! He blushed to say it. Here was one of

those jokes which just possibly might have been almost funny, if they had come off.

And he had put himself again at the House Master's mercy.

"Where did you get it from?" asked Mr. Hasting with judicial sternness.

"The kitchen," answered Jack, with a sullenness that sprang from anger less against Hasting than against himself. Fool! Fool!

"What were you intending to do with it?" went on the cross-examination.

"I was going to put it—somewhere where you'd find it," Jack replied in utter wretchedness. What can be worse than having to explain one's joke?

The other, in any case, quite failed to see it. He spoke in very deep tones, without the slightest vestige of amusement.

"You realize, of course, Winter," he began with slow seriousness, "what you have laid yourself open to by this absurd behaviour?"

"Yes, sir." Jack, by now, was utterly abased. Oh for somebody to kick him! He had exposed himself, he saw now, to another book from this beast whom he hated; who he felt (quite unjustly) was revelling in having caught him out.

"Not content with your behaviour yesterday," the calm slow voice went on; a droning torture, like that of the judge who lectures before passing sentence—"behaviour which came as a climax to a whole term's insubordination, you must show your penitence by entering my study in my absence, and playing this unworthy trick," (Here he touched gingerly

the foolscap, slowly becoming sodden with green juices, and Jack felt horribly ashamed.) "Do not misunderstand me, Winter. In estimating the seriousness of this offence, I do not lay much stress on this tasteless performance of yours as such: but I regard it as a sign of your impenitence and as the last move in a long campaign of sedition and almost open mutiny. You steal into my kitchen, just as you now steal into my study, and——"

"*I didn't!*" Jack cried warmly. It was almost refreshing for one moment to be in the right. "I went and asked cook and she gave it me."

"Very well," said Mr. Hasting just in the same voice, "you draw even my servants into complicity in tasteless jokes at my expense. You set them against me, just as you set all my House. Ever since you came to Sefton, Winter—or ever since you gained some power here—the temper of my House towards me has changed sensibly. For some time I have been able to put my finger clearly on the centre of this disaffection. I had already spoken seriously, this morning, to the Head Master, and now that this present episode comes so closely upon yesterday's, I find myself unable to disregard it further, or to disagree further with the Head Master's own impression. You no doubt realize that it is inevitable you should leave Sefton."

Jack unconsciously took a step backward. "What, sir?" he asked aimlessly. He had not even dreamt of that.

"You may consider yourself expelled," said Mr. Hasting, in clear tones,

“ Expelled ! ” repeated Jack, still almost dazed. “ But, sir—you don’t see, sir—I only meant it as a joke——”

The House Master held up his hand. “ Believe me, Winter,” he said, “ I am sorry. Argument can only be painful and will make no difference. I quite realize that you have many admirable qualities and I hope you will do well out in the world ; but in my House you are a dangerous element, subversive of all discipline, and it is impossible you should remain. Of course you will have to interview the Head Master, but his views, even before this ” (he waved a hand once more at the absurd accusing cabbage) “ coincided with my own, and the most that you can hope is that we may induce him to let you be regarded as technically sent away only for a term and so avoid the stigma of expulsion. Believe me, Winter, I have no animus against you, but it is impossible you should remain in my House, and in fact, for all our sakes, I should infinitely prefer that you leave it by a late train to-night. That is what I shall make an effort to arrange.”

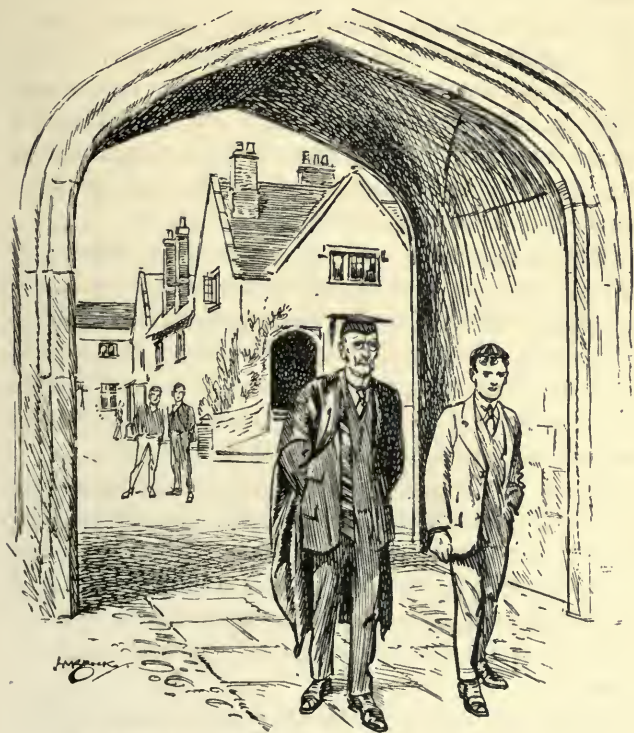
IV

Everybody knew in half-an-hour.

That ill-assorted couple, Jack and Hasting, roused comment out on the School grounds ; much more, when their destination proved to be the Head Master’s study. Jack’s face, on the return journey, told the rest.

Moreover, from a window in the Sick Room, where

he had been isolated while his box was packed, his parents warned, and other necessary preparations



'That ill-assorted couple
roured comment'

made, he managed to shout details down to Knox and a few others.

He was sacked. . . . What for? Oh, for putting cabbage upon Hasting's chair and being "dangerous" to such innocent lambs as themselves. (He

felt, by now, that he must carry the thing off with a high hand.) No, he couldn't come down; old H. considered him infectious! Yes, off to-night—5.40. *Just* get him home. Catch the last connection from Birmingham, with half-an-hour to spare. . . . What? The Sherborough Match? Yes, rather rotten bad luck, wasn't it? The very day before! Ram off, somehow? Oh no; he *had* tried; he'd got to go. . . . But anyhow, Pollock would be able to play, after all! Probably better for the School. . . .

They wondered at his calmness, calling him a rum devil, as they went away full of excitement, indignation, and wild schemes for forcing their House Master to relent. They did not realize that, for anyone in Jack Winter's position, there is no mid-course between a light-hearted bravado and an utter breakdown, of which he would feel shame.

When they had gone, however, he sat down in the chill, bare Sick Room and could keep himself no longer from facing the real facts. More than any of his friends, he saw what this thing meant to him. No Sherborough Match; the end of all his splendid time with his good pals; and—telling them at home.

With unseeing eyes and a mind too heavy almost for thought, he gazed out across the field that he had loved so well, and waited for the cab that would bear him away.

Down below, meanwhile, indignation grew apace.

The news spread, as news can spread nowhere else than in a school, at lightning speed; and even those who had been furious at the idea of Winter playing

in the match, were now mad at the idea that he should be prevented. Rotten thing to do, said everyone, spoiling Sefton's chance like that ! . . .

In Hasting's House, moreover, there was added the personal feeling that sprang from affection for the victim. Jack to be sacked, of everyone—and just because he hadn't liked old Hasting's cabbage ! The studies simply buzzed with protest.

The first idea, of course, had been that somebody must " ram him off " ; and the Head of the House was found to be the proper person for this intercession. Montagu, a nervous, weedy boy, who owed his position to scholarship alone, was literally pushed into the Master's study.

" Well, Montagu ? " came in ominously icy tones from Hasting, who naturally guessed his object.

" P-please, sir, I came to ask you, sir, if—— Please, sir, they say Winter's been expelled ? " Montagu wished that Knox and all the others were not listening at the keyhole. It made him feel an idiot.

" The rumour is correct," said Hasting dryly.

There was a short pause.

" Please, sir, I—some of the fellows wondered if you would——"

Hasting left no room for wonder. He was firm. " I can guess, Montagu," he interrupted, " what you have come to say. Let me save time by telling you at once that I cannot listen to any pleas. You have no *locus standi* in this matter."

" But, please, sir——" Those listening ears forced him to persist.

The House Master held up an impressive hand,

with all the dignity of a policeman. "This is a matter, Montagu, that does not concern you. You have no *locus standi* whatsoever."

"Then who *has* any?" Montagu asked weakly. He could almost feel Knox's scorn through the thick door.

"*Nobody* has any, Montagu. This matter concerns only Winter, myself, and the Head Master." He took up a sheet of paper with a gesture that said, "Now—good-bye!"

"Thank you, sir," the Head Boy answered ruefully, and went away to face his critics.

Nobody could find a way, though everybody felt there must be one. Jack to be expelled! The day before the Sherborough Match! They even muttered, in some studies, the word Mutiny: but all the seniors realized, as they debated matters in the big end-study, which is known as Topper, that nothing could be gained by yet more First Eleven men getting expelled.

Hope and anger had made way for resentment and despair, when Topper's door opened and in strode Bentley.

The business-like, determined air of the Blue somehow acted as a tonic to them all. Everybody looked brighter suddenly.

"Well," he said breezily, "this is a bad business! I've rammed the Head, but he won't listen. What are you going to do?" He spoke as though he knew there were several various ways out, the sole thing being to select the best.

He listened for a little to their hopelessly wild

plans; and then, when all had been exploded and everybody sat in a gloomy silence, he broke in on it with a new note in his voice; a note of excitement and of nervousness.

"*I've* got one idea," he began in a tentative way, and all revived immediately, "but it's a bit risky. I'd do what I could, but I should want one or two to help me, and it might only end in more of you getting the sack! And it mightn't come off, after all. It's only an off chance." He knew how to enlist people in a desperate enterprise—he meant at all costs that his "discovery" should play for Sefton—and so he spoke now as though he had given up the scheme on wiser second thoughts.

"Go on!" "What is it?" "Let's hear!" everybody cried.

Bentley still seemed very doubtful. "It's jolly risky," he said, as if that would discourage them; "and it's the merest sporting chance, but if any of you are game to take it at that——"

They gathered eagerly around to hear.

V

Scarcely daring to allow himself the luxury of a last look, Jack Winter drove sadly out of the School gates. His cab was early, and he was glad that no misguided friend had gathered the fellows to give him a "send-off." Sitting back gloomily against the leather cushions, he was only too relieved that none of his great pals were on the central path as he drove down. A few boys from other Houses,

returning from Third School, looked curiously into the dark cab and said " Poor devil ! " ; one or two even waved their hands and shouted out a kindly meant " Rough luck ! " ; but he made no response. He breathed more freely when once they were out upon the road.

The 5.40 goes from Ockenham, a three-mile drive, for the last connecting train from Sefton had already left.

Jack's one dread was that Knox and some of the others, meaning to be friendly, might have walked along to Ockenham ; and his one consolation, later, that lock-ups, which begin at 5.45, would make that quite impossible.

So, feeling that he had cut the last bond with Sefton and finding an odd comfort in the fact, he stared dreamily out at the well-heathered common which surrounds the little dusty road, marked out at night by its white railings. A wintry sunset glowed red upon the hills and mirrored itself in the narrow irrigation streams, spanned by their ridiculous plank bridges. Everything promised an ideal day, to-morrow, for the match. It would have been easier, perhaps, to leave Sefton in the rain. . . .

He was jerked from his sad reverie by the abrupt stopping of his cab.

A sudden exclamation from the driver, a scraping of hoofs from the sleepy, antique nag ; and the door was thrown open.

" 'Ere's a rum go, if there ever was ! " exclaimed the village cabman excitedly.

" What's up, Prout ? " Jack asked without in-

terest. Nothing mattered now. He wished the fellow would have driven on.

"Look for yourself, sir!" cried the other.

His geniality was trying. Usually one only saw old Prout at term-end, when one did not mind. Now Jack resented it. He did not want to look at anything.

He got languidly out on to the road, and his driver, unable to wait, explained in the meantime what he was to see.

"Bridge gone!" he cried out laconically.

"Bridge gone!" echoed Jack. "But there have been no floods."

Yet so it was. A vast gap, due to the absence of a dozen planks, yawned in the middle of the way to Ockenham. In flood-time that need not surprise: Nature, in the guise of a swollen stream, often triumphed over Man, in the shape of those local sappers who had made this humble road.

This year, however, there had been no floods. A placid current rippled three feet below the two main beams on which the missing planks had rested. *Distinctly* a rum go! . . .

Mr. Prout, in fact, not altogether satisfied, had scrambled out into mid-stream along one of these supports, and was making scientific investigation into the cause of this disaster.

"'Mph," he said presently, and that was all. Then he turned the horse's head around.

"Can't take the keb across nohow, sir," he explained.

He did not feel called upon for further comments.

Twelve years' residence near a big school teaches a man to see, hear and guess exactly so much as he fancies that the boys intend. Life is easier like that!

No doubt Mr. Hasting would ask questions: and so the prudent driver gave no sign of noticing a ragged cheer from out a spreading gorse-bush; applause that greeted the homeward turning of his cab.

Jack heard it and gave a melancholy smile. Now he understood, at last. They meant it well—a "score" off old Hasting—but nothing could have been less welcome to himself.

As Bentley and his accomplices set off briskly across country, to get home before lock-ups and so prove an alibi, Jack was rattled back again along the dusty road. He re-entered the School gates even more sad than he had left them. Everyone, by now, was in the Houses—that was something; but once more he must face the parting, the shrinking back against the cushion—everything again, to-morrow! . . .

Hasting was astounded at his entry.

"'Bridge gone'? How do you mean, 'gone'?" . . . I must see Prout to-morrow. The bridge can't possibly be 'gone.' . . . Meanwhile, understand, Winter, that this manœuvre will not gain you anything. To-night you will sleep in the Sick Room, and to-morrow morning you will catch a train from Sefton."

"Yes, sir," Jack answered wearily, "but I didn't do the bridge."

Hasting very nearly smiled. "I don't think, Winter, anything is to be gained by discussion of who 'did' the bridge, as you express it. The Praepostors will no doubt deal with that to-morrow. At any rate, it did not 'do' itself—if it was 'done' at all."

VI

"Thank you, Mr. Prout. I am much obliged to you for coming round. It is altogether an extraordinary affair."

"*Most* extraordinary," agreed the cab-owner with unction, making for the door in some relief.

"One moment, Mr. Prout," cried the House Master. "I shall want a cab again this morning, at 10.30—for Sefton, this time. Good morning."

"Good mornin', sir, and much obliged to you."

Mr. Hasting, who had been hurried away from his breakfast to see Prout, sat and wondered darkly for a moment. So the bridge *had* actually gone? . . . A queer coincidence! . . .

"Come in!"

He made a hasty sham of being busy.

"May I come in, sir, for a moment?" Bentley's head appeared round the door.

"Why, certainly, Bentley, of course," answered the master, with much geniality. The sportsman side of him admired this world-famous player, and also it always pleased him to be called "sir" by Old Boys. "What brings you around so early?" He motioned him to an arm-chair.

Bentley was a believer in directness.

"I've come, sir," he said frankly, "to ask if you will allow Winter to play for us to-day."

The other's friendliness vanished in a moment. "Against Sherborough?" he asked, merely to gain time. It was not likely to be against Newcastle or Barnsley.

"Yes, sir." (Bentley meant to work in all the "sirs" that he could possibly contrive!) "It's bound to be a terribly close match: Sherborough's said to be stronger than usual: and Winter's our best man. I told you so yesterday, didn't I, sir, before—before all this happened?"

Mr. Hasting felt his sporting instincts uncomfortably alive, and felt also that his one chance was to be pedagogic and quite firm at once.

"I'm sorry, Bentley," he said with finality, "but it *has* happened now. What you ask is utterly impossible, and I regret it just as much as you. Technically, Winter is no longer at the School."

"Technically, sir," repeated Bentley; "but actually, owing to this accident——"

The master glanced up rapidly, but only met the firm, calm eye, set deep, and possibly twinkling a little, in the Old Boy's healthy face.

"This accident," he answered with emphasis, "is a mere accident and cannot possibly affect the case."

"I suppose you realize," said Bentley, far more warmly, and quite forgetting the diplomatic "sir," "that it will probably mean losing the match, the first year we've had any chance, and all really for nothing?"

The other, too, spoke with more feeling. "That, I think, is a question for *me* and the Head Master. We have decided that the boy is an unhealthy influence for the School discipline, and we do not intend that he shall have a further opportunity of contaminating his schoolfellows."

All this quite failed to impress the Blue.

"I quite see that, sir," he answered breezily. "But I understand the whole thing was all about some cabbage, and there won't be any eating in the match! I really don't see how Winter could contaminate anybody on the footer field."

Old Hasting smiled about ten times in a term. Now there was a flicker of his thin, stern lips, and Bentley knew that he had won.

"The thing has gone beyond me, Bentley," came the feeble answer. "It rests now with the Head Master. The boy is no longer a member of my House." Somehow he could not undertake the responsibility of saying no. Sefton to lose, because of him! No, the Head must decide, it was too big a thing to do. . . . And somehow, too—after a night's rest and under Bentley's mockery—he found the expelled boy less dangerous. Had it all really been "about some cabbage"?

His visitor could not keep back a note of triumph. "In that case," he said eagerly, "I think it is all right. I got the Head's permission, before I came along to you."

"Got it!" echoed Hasting weakly.

"Got it! He said that, as Head Master, he felt justified in relaxing school discipline thus far, for

the School's sake, or words to that effect. And *you've* got no objection, sir. So——"

Then the rare smile came.

"Bentley," said old Hasting, in quite a new voice, "I'm talking frankly to you, just between ourselves, and—I am glad! The boy has got to go: he was insubordinate, grossly insubordinate" (here was the School voice again), "but I was feeling sorry to rob him of this chance: and if, as you say, the School——" Then it seemed difficult to say, and he broke off.

Bentley tactfully got up. "Thank you, sir," he said. "Thanks a thousand times. Everyone'll say you've done the proper thing; and as to the match, I believe myself you will be justified. I think, now, we are bound to win."

"I hope so; I hope so," said the other keenly.

But as the Blue was by the door, some different part of this odd mixture that was Mr. Hasting seemed to speak.

"Remember, however, Bentley, that the boy is expelled, and no privilege can alter that. I will re-order his cab to catch an evening train, in accordance with the Head Master's permission, but this is all that I can do. I cannot allow him, as an expelled boy, to spend another night inside this House. The thing would be preposterous." He half began to feel that it was not much less already.

Bentley kept his face for just one final effort.

"I quite see that, sir," he said; and added in the best manner of a prize-book hero: "I should never think, of course, of trying to interfere with the

School discipline. I was only pleading for Winter as essential to the School's success."

Then he hurriedly went back to Knox.

VII

"Play up, Sefton! *Play up, Sefton!*"

There was, at any rate, no lack of noise to-day.

Up and down the close-packed line of fellows rolled the shouting: a bellow of encouragement, when anybody got the ball; a frank groan of dismay when anybody missed; polite applause when Sherborough won a success; delirious shrieking, cap-waving and back-thumping, when Sefton had the luck to score.

Twice, then, had the Seftonians been polite, and twice delirious. Twice, on exactly opposite occasions, the little knot of Sherborough visitors had shown the same emotions.

Now, with the score two all and Time perilously near, the cries of encouragement became more plaintive. Nothing loses hope more rapidly than a school crowd, and since the Sherburians had equalized, the ball seemed absolutely settled around Sefton's goal.

"*Pla-a-a-y up, Sefton! Oh, play up, Sefton!*" Such was the long-drawn despairing cry.

Watches in every hand; each with a different theory of how the seconds went; nobody prayed for anything except the whistle that would close the match.

If only they could draw! Even Bentley asked

for nothing more than that, by now; and even he was very near despair.

Again and again did the Sherburians shoot; again and again by some misjudgment of their men or skill of the Seftonian goal-keeper, the ball found itself out upon the field once more—but never near the Sherborough goal. The visiting backs, almost ostentatiously idle, hung about quite near the centre line.

Pressing, Sherborough always pressing, and still no sign of Time !

“ Oh, blow your beastly whistle ! ” cried a junior Seftonian : and then indignantly to his friend, “ He’s forgotten ! He’ll lose us the match ! ”

“ Forty seconds yet,” replied the other, with all the calm superiority of one who had a stop-watch given him upon his fourteenth birthday.

“ Pla-a-a-a-y up, Sefton ! ” came a few desperate appeals, and Bentley shouted out “ Get it away ! ” But mostly they had got beyond the shouting period. A silence fell upon the field. Everybody’s one idea was not to drown the welcome final whistle.

Then suddenly, while a bored referee trotted about gazing at his watch, and the very players seemed to lose energy, waiting for the end—suddenly a new roar rolled along the Sefton side. Watches were forgotten; every one strained forward on the sagging rope; everybody yelled.

“ Played, sir ! Well *played* ! Sefton ! SEFTON ! Shoot ! ”

What could it matter what you said ?

Winter had got the ball.

Somehow, by some miracle not yet explained, he got it from that listless central squash; was past the half-backs almost before they could see that he had started; out in the open, amidst deafening yells; out, with the ball bouncing easily between his speeding feet.

On to him rushes one of the so idle Sherborough giants, and prudently the other hurries back. Suddenly awake, the goal-keeper dances lightly on his toes, prepared to leap this way or that.

“Shoot!” “Pass!” “Shoot!” Everyone has some advice. The Blue’s is drowned amid this roar of experts.

Down upon Winter dashes the first back, and everybody suddenly is still. “Oh, pass!” comes the murmur: then a silence, then—pandemonium.

By some unholy magic—it can be no less—Winter is dashing on towards the goal; the ball still bouncing happily between his feet; the back running doggedly behind him.

On to him rushes Sherborough’s second string.

“Shoot! Shoot!” everyone agrees at last.

And Winter shoots; it is his only chance. A little shuffle with his feet; a sideway dash to clear the line to goal; a healthy kick—and silence, utterly dead silence save for indrawn breath, as the ball darts towards the net; the goal-keeper towards the ball.

Then once more pandemonium, but worse!

Close underneath the bar, at its left end, the ball has whizzed. Rapid the dancing goal-keeper, but far more rapid it.



"And Winter Shoots"

Howls, yells, shrieks, cat-calls, all the weird noises of the Indians, now; watches forgotten; caps thrown recklessly away; old Hasting with tears in his eyes; the Head beating his hands red; and Bentley, forgetful who might hear, shouting out aloud, "Great Scott! He's done it!"

And as the goal-keeper stoops wearily to pick up the triumphant ball, that other, long-expected whistle sounds.

The match is over, and Sefton, for the first time, has beaten Sherborough.

VIII

"Put him down now, you men," said Bentley of a sudden, "you'll pull him to bits!"

Jack, seized by an impulsive crowd of Hastingites, set upon their shoulders and dragged anyhow across the field—his knees upon two shoulders, often a full yard apart—was not sorry to be on the ground again; and yet as he stood there, amid a new outburst of cheers, the whole bitterness of the present, driven out by his excitement, came back in its fulness. What an ironical position—a hero, yet disgraced!

Some of the fellows wondered later whether Bentley had not had some other idea in his head besides consideration for Jack's limbs. In any case the order to put him down came, whether by chance or no, just as they drew alongside of old Hasting. . . .

The House Master pushed his way eagerly through the small knot of his fellows.

“ Splendid—splendid ! ” he cried, with all the keenness of a boy, and nobody had ever seen his eyes so bright. “ An excellent shot—the very nicest I’ve seen put in here. Congratulations, Winter ! They’ll be sick at Sherborough to-day.”

The Head Master said the same thing. “ Splendid—splendid ! ” and he shook Jack’s hand as though he could not let it go. Sherborough at last was beaten !

“ Thank you, sir,” said Jack gratefully ; and then—whether it was that he was tired, or that the last day’s happenings had been too much for him, or that sympathy, just then, was fatal—in any case, for the first time in five years, Jack, seventeen and member of the First Eleven, found two tears coursing down his cheeks.

The other fellows had luckily all gone away ; or rather, Bentley had taken them away. “ Let’s give poor old Winter a welcome in the Changing Room,” he had said ; and it seemed good to them. They ran helter-skelter for the House.

“ Winter,” said the House Master, with a curious shy tenderness, “ if you’re tired after—after all this, don’t trouble to get up for First School.”

Jack, feeling that he would give a fortune to stop those childish tears, avoided Hasting’s eyes. Surely he could not have forgotten ? He was to catch the 5.14 at Sefton.

“ I think I’d rather go to-night, sir,” he began. “ Besides, the cab——”

Again that famous smile of Hasting’s, such a happy omen. “ I think, Winter, that Mr. Prout

can easily be 'squared'! . . . I have just been talking with the Head Master, and he agrees that dash and impetuosity are only vices at *some* moments . . . No doubt somebody in your Form will tell you what the construe is for Second School."

"You mean, sir——" said Jack, with a sudden feeling that the sun had come out and the whole world was different.

Hasting became the reserved, diffident pedagogue once more.

"I think, Winter, we may let the Past be past? And at the present moment I must not keep you in the cold and I believe the House is waiting to give you a cheer."

Whereat he walked away abruptly.

So that the said cheer was given, not only for Jack, but three times three, and more, for old Hasting, until he wondered if he ought to come and stop the uproar. Perhaps it is as well that he did not, for his presence could only have made it the more noisy.

"I must say," said Knox, "that he's a regular old sport."

"Hang it all," said Jack, in a moment of bravado, "I'll eat his beastly cabbage till I bust."

This did not seem logic. "Why?" asked Knox.

It is never easy to explain an impulse, and Jack, thus pressed, fell back upon a formula. "'As a token,'" he said, "'of esteem and gratitude!'"

This episode provides a splendid text for those who rightly hold that games and their players exert too much influence on even our best Public Schools,

since certainly no set of Greek iambics, however sensational in quality, could ever have wrought so many changes in a single year as have been effected by Jack Winter's single goal.

Let only three of them be set on record. Thursday, in Hasting's, is now always mashed turnips. Secondly, if you ask Hasting who is the best fellow in his House, he will probably point to his new trusted Head Boy, Winter (who does not owe his place to scholarship); whilst if you enquire of Winter who is the most decent master in the School, most certainly he will say "Hasting."

And thirdly, all previous nicknames for this last have been superseded. He is now known as "The Old Sport."



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